THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

Summer Fiction Issue

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Drue Heinz Literature Prize

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The University of Pittsburgh Press and the Howard Heinz Endowment announce the fifth Drue Heinz Literature Prize for a collection of short fiction to be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. The winner will be announced during January 1985, and will receive a cash award of $5,000 and publication by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1985 under its standard royalty contract.

Eligibility

1. The award is open to writers who have published a book-length collection of fiction or a minimum of three short stories or novellas in commercial magazines or literary journals of national distribution.
2. The award is open to writers in English, whether or not they are citizens of the United States.
3. Translations are not eligible, unless they are translations into English done by the author himself or herself.
4. Submissions should consist of a manuscript of short stories, one or more novellas (for the purpose of this award we define a novella as a longer piece of fiction, no more than 150 double-spaced typed pages), or a combination of one or more novellas and short stories.
5. Work previously published in book form as a collection of fiction solely by the author is not eligible.
6. Stories or novellas previously published in book form as part of an anthology of fiction are eligible.

Format for Submissions

1. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced on good-quality white paper, and pages should be numbered consecutively.
2. Manuscripts should be no fewer than 150 and no more than 300 typescript pages.
3. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a list of the writer's published work.
4. Xerox copies are acceptable if readily legible and printed on good-quality white (not gray) paper.
5. Each manuscript should have a cover page listing the title of the collection and the author's name, address, and telephone number; *the author's name should not appear elsewhere on the manuscript.*
6. Each manuscript must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope or book-mailer large enough to accommodate the manuscript; otherwise, the manuscript cannot be returned.

Multiple Submissions

1. Authors may submit manuscripts sent to the Press to other publishers while the manuscripts are with us; please notify the Press immediately if a manuscript submitted for the Prize has been accepted for publication elsewhere.
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Dates for Submission

1. Manuscripts should be mailed *only during July and August,* and in any event must be postmarked not later than August 31.
2. Manuscripts received before July cannot be acknowledged; manuscripts postmarked later than August 31 will be returned unread.
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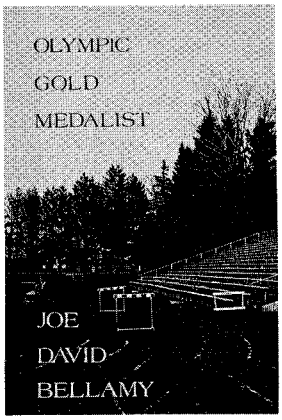

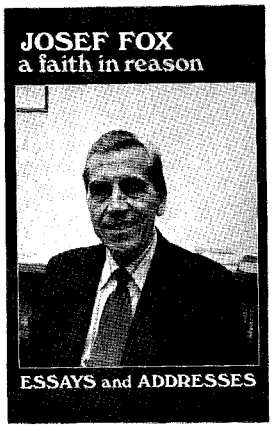

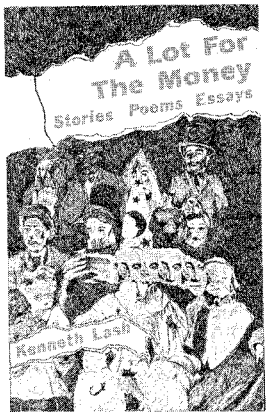

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We've no idea what the Eastern Bloc boycott of the Summer Olympics will do to those entrepreneurs described by Louis Owens on page four of this number of the NAR, but we are bemused by the politics of the event. The picture of the Soviet bureaucracy nursing its Olympic grudge against the West for four years—four impatient years of waiting to get even—seems ludicrous. As it was only the West's athletes who suffered for the 1980 boycott, so is it only the East's who will suffer for this one. The philosophy of "an eye for an eye" is invariably self-defeating; even its apparent victories turn out to be Pyrrhic. However, since in the behavior of nations one learns from others' mistakes only how to repeat the mistakes, we suppose it's fair to expect the philosophy to retain its perverse currency. We note with a certain wariness that such revenge, practiced off the playing fields, can be consequential.

In any case, the Games are on, and we offer—for reading between and after television coverages—a marathon list of stories and poems by writers known and unknown, the usual regulars at their regular stands, and a quite extraordinary look at the world of living and dying by some talented newcomers.

Some fiction, recent and forthcoming, of interest to NAR readers: *Budding Prospects*, by T. Coraghessan Boyle (Viking); *Curves of Pursuit*, by Thomas Farber (Putnam); *The Hunting Years*, by David Kranes (Gibbs Smith); *The Town of Ballymuck*, by Victor Power (Swallow's Tale); and *Mercy Flights*, by Mary Peterson (Missouri). All five authors have been represented here, and portions of the last three titles first appeared in this magazine.

Other fiction writers are reminded that the NAR will *not* resume reading manuscripts until October 1st. Poets and essayists are welcome to submit work before that date, but should keep in mind that we are all lazier and slower in the summer.

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★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

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Going for the Gold in L.A.

The Santa Anas are blowing again in Los Angeles, spilling over the San Gabriel Mountains and swirling their positive ions along the concrete contours of the new 7-Up Olympic cycling velodrome and McDonald's Olympic swimming stadium. And Raymond Chandler was right: Angelinos are feeling the edges of their carving knives. But this time the natives are preparing to skin a few tourists, say seven hundred thousand or a million, when the Summer Olympics come to town.

If America is the New Canaan and California the Eldorado of that Promised Land, then Los Angeles is the fabled Cibola, the city of quick and easy gold where immigrants still arrive with dreams of the good life of palms and plenty—sun, surf, and saunas. It is only natural that Angelinos, as they like to call themselves, would sniff the Olympic breezes with delight, alert to the golden potential in that well-heeled pilgrimage of enthusiasts soon to be streaming in from all over the world to bed and board within the smog-hazed outlines of the city. Money is the real miracle of these Olympics. From Olympic venues financed by 7-Up and McDonald's and ARCO to the minting of Olympic coins to the tune of more than $30 million, L.A. is making sure that it won't end up licking its financial wounds à la Montreal. In fact, not only does the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) insist that no money will be lost, they have announced the probability of a world-class profit of $15.5 million from projected Games revenues of $500 million. At the rate of $28,000 a day merely from interest on advance ticket sales, it's not difficult to imagine profits being made.

The whetting of the carving knife is not furtive in Los Angeles; this is no skulking-in-the-dark design to rip off the hapless visitor. The 1984 Olympics are a celebrated commercial cause, as up-front and gold-lamé as Rodeo Drive. The official doctrine confronts us daily in the form of billboards and television ads for the official Olympic candy bar, peanut butter, camera, supermarket, etc. Even the mystic fire of the Olympic torch has not escaped this official financial wizardry, as the LAOOC auctions off one-kilometer rights—a mere $3,000—to carry the torch. At that rate, your average Saturday-morning joggers will pay four or five hundred bucks a minute for the right to trot along with visions of Lacedaemonia dancing before them.

It is the torch relay that has claimed the most international attention thus far in Olympic fiscal preparations, especially since Spyros Fotinos, the mayor of lazy little Olympia, Greece, came out in righteous denunciation of the plan, exclaiming that "The Olympic flame is not a dollar sign. . . ." Even after learning that the proceeds from the run will go to youth activities in the U.S., Fotinos holds to his Olympian stance.

Had he known of the Caesar's Tahoe Casino plan to raffle off fifty of the relay legs in Stateline, Nevada, he might indeed have invoked the wrath of Zeus. Or he might have lined up for the prize mini-vacation at Tahoe and the $1984 in cash promised by Caesar's. Even a hardened Greek might not be able to resist such a Caesarean lure.

While the LAOOC has had the spotlight thus far for its financial acumen, the real story of 1984 Olympic gold belongs to the ordinary citizens of Los Angeles. Throughout Southern California the warm foehn winds send dollar signs tumbling through the traffic-choked streets as the highest and the lowest seraphim gear up to shave a profit from the estimated $2.3 to $4 billion the games will generate.

Even before arriving in L.A., Olympic pilgrims will encounter the zeal of private enterprise as airlines introduce their "Olympic Blackout Dates." During these dates, discount fares will be suspended, meaning that a $55 flight from L.A. to Las Vegas will cost $85, and a round-trip fare between New York and L.A. will vault from $566 to $866.

To prevent hotels and motels from vaulting with equal vigor into the race for gold, L.A. mayor Tom Bradley has proposed price controls during the games, a proposal quickly rejected by the city council in favor of a plan to allow hotels and motels to police themselves. The effectiveness of such self-control may be in doubt; according to newspaper reports, one motel chain has already announced rate increases of up to 342%, while another hotel has boosted its room rates for the games from $59 to $150.

Olympic visitors may get a break when it's time to dine, for the thought of a million hungry sports aficionados is so dazzling to the restaurant industry that major restauranteurs have organized their own "Olympics Restaurant Ethics Committee" to prevent unseemly ripoffs in the competition for the $115 million that will be spent on food and drink. Even if the committee succeeds in its goal of freezing prices and portions at January 1, 1984 levels, many fear that the flood of ambitious and clever temporary help (in L.A., read unemployed actors) may fleece foreign visitors by such larcenous methods as the slipping in of bogus bills.

Even without such special touches by part-time waiters, visitors to the L.A. Olympics are in for some shocks because of the inflated value of the dollar against foreign currencies. In 1980, for example, a dollar could buy twenty Yugoslav *dinars*, while today the same dollar would rake in about 124 *dinars*, a trauma-inducing 600% inflation. The foreign press, precociously alert to this raid on their wallets, are already beginning to grouse about such costs as an additional $663 to $957 for the installation of a second phone in the press center. British journalist John Rodda of the *Guardian* charges that the LAOOC is a "mercenary" outfit determined to shake down the games for all it can get.

As enterprising as the LAOOC and large businesses have been in preparing for these Olympics, it is really the little man and woman of Southern California who deserve respect and attention, after months of scurrying through every crack and crevice in search of whatever golden

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…ibs may fall their way—and some …ery attractive crumbs have turned up. Legitimate examples: the Panama Glove Company, which has revamped to sew Olympic tote bags with the five interlocking rings and Sam the Eagle on the side; Cervantes Neckwear, Inc., a company accustomed to making novelty neckwear like Mickey Mouse ties but now preparing to turn out Sam the Eagle and Stars in Motion ties; all over Southern California, ordinary citizens turning from everyday non-Olympian tasks to make tote bags and ties, seat cushions and t-shirts, doing whatever is necessary to live for a year off the proceeds generated by a two-week event.

Perhaps the quickest profit potential lies in Olympic tickets, a scarce commodity ladled out by lottery. It took no time at all for Angelinos to figure out the resale value of items as rare as invitations to the Academy Awards. On January 20th of this year, one ticket broker in L.A. was offering the best seat to a premier event for $1100, a comfortable profit margin for even the most determined competitor.

All of this potential bonanza pales, however, in the gleam from Angelinos' eyes when they contemplate the profit to be made from giving up their homes for two weeks this summer and playing host to Olympic guests. With 100,000 visitors a day pouring into an already saturated area, competition for room and bed will be stiff. A glance at the *Los Angeles Times*' special "Classified Marketplace for the '84 Games" gives one a reasonable idea of expectations in this area. Typical ads from spring editions of the *Times* offered a house forty miles south of L.A. for $3500 a week during the Olympics; a condo in L.A. for $400-$500 a day; a Beverly Hills home for $12,000 a week; or a Claremont home complete with maid and Mercedes for $20,000 a month (a steal compared to the Bel Air home rumored already to be rented for $100,000 for the duration of the games).

To prevent landlords from reacting with undue enthusiasm to this bonanza by throwing out their tenants in order to make room for high-rolling Olympic guests, the Los Angeles city council has approved a moratorium barring owners from evicting tenants for the ostensible purposes of renting to relatives or

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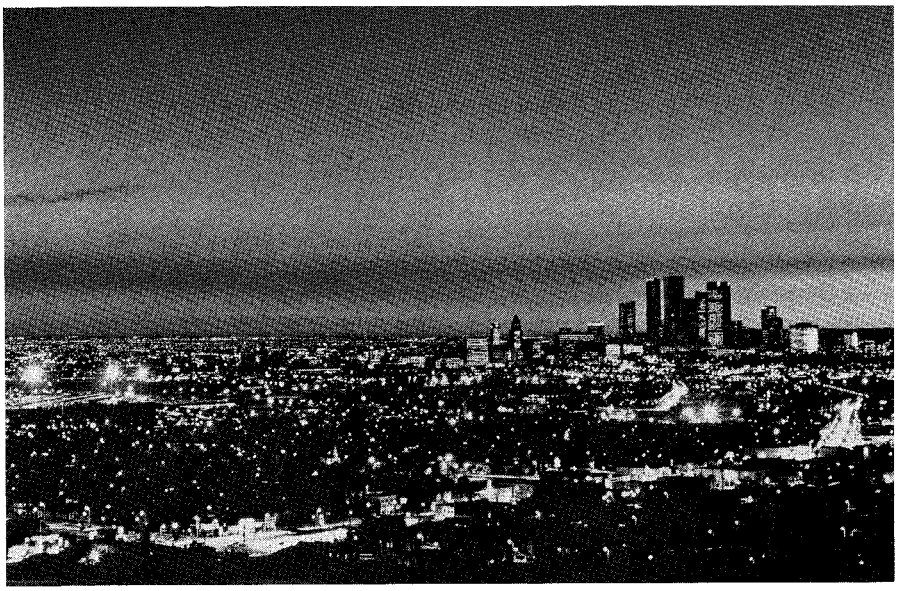

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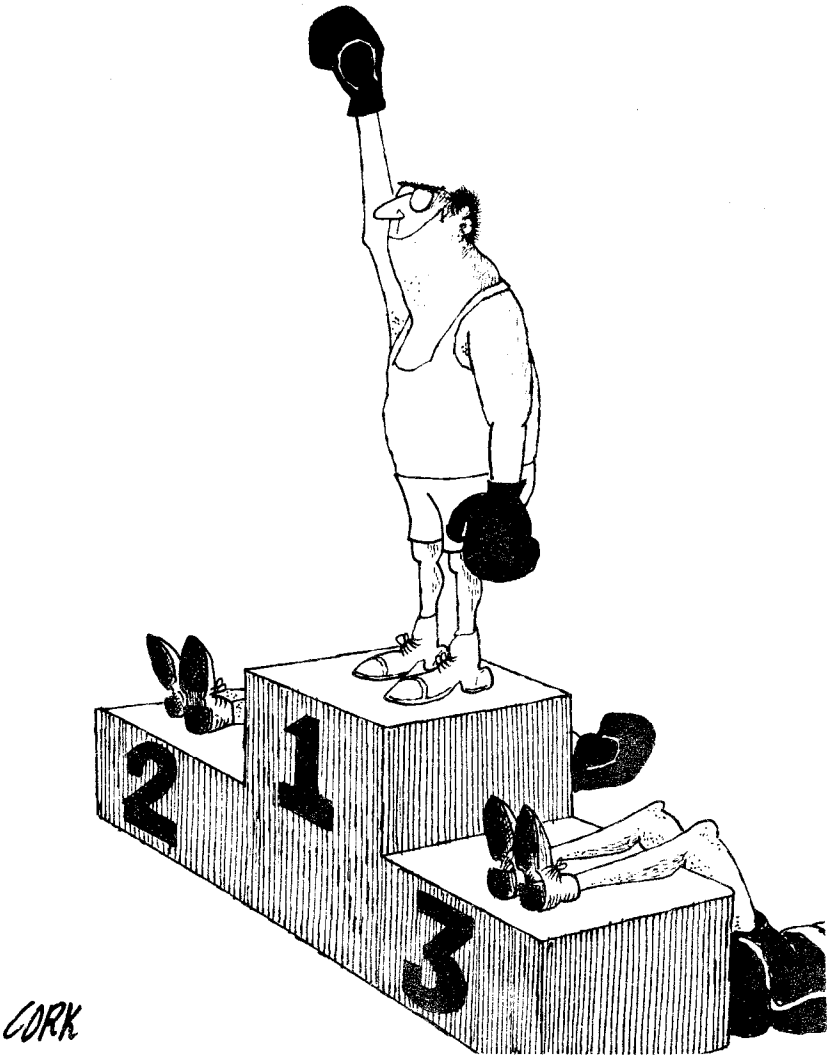
refurbishing. The moratorium ends when the games are over. The council has good reason to be skeptical of landlord motives during the next few months, for entrepreneurs have gathered quickly around such rental possibilities, with more than one hundred Olympic home outlets already operating to find occupants for private houses or apartments. At least one eager agency has already been charged with theft, operating without a real estate license, and misrepresentation. The company, Gold Medal Accommodations, allegedly charged non-refundable fees of $80 to $220 to nearly one thousand homeowners, promising rents up to $700 a day during the games. It was the old take-the-money-and-run scheme. Said one victim, disillusioned by her own dream of Olympic gold, "I'm through. I don't want to have anything to do with the Olympics. I may not even look at it on television."

But the glitter of gold is so powerful in the Southern California sun that one of the most horrifying nightmares to surface in 1983 was the fear that the street gangs of Los Angeles, those deadly picaros who work the barrios and inner-city streets by night, would emulate their betters and organize to divide the spoils. The fear, discussed seriously in high L.A. administrative circles and on local news broadcasts, was that the gangs would call a general truce for the period of the games and divide up both the turf and the innocent, flush victims come to watch amateurs vie for glory. Fortunately, for everyone, this particular bad dream seems comfortably forgotten as the summer draws closer.



Perhaps the most incisive commentary on the darker aspects of the '84 Summer Olympics is Belgian-born Carl Colpaert's twelve-minute movie entitled "Aggelos." In this short, an ancient Greek warrior emerges from the ocean at Malibu, carrying the Olympic torch. After a series of encounters, including one with a mugger who tries to snatch the torch, the warrior turns wearily and disappears into the Pacific once again.

If all of this sounds cynical, it is. Los Angeles is a cynical city, a stirring together of the essential ingredients that make America: an undying belief in the promise of Eldorado, a tenacity of hope in the mercenary future, and a sharp and often defensive sense of what F. Scott Fitzgerald called a "vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty." When the Santa Ana winds come sweeping down the tinder-dry canyons this summer to push the smog out to sea, residents and visitors alike will undoubtedly give thanks for the gift of breathable air as they sweat and eye one another nervously. Every hand will be on billfold or purse. Every thought will be of gold. *—Louis Owens*

New Orleans Journal: Spring

WATER

New Orleans looks like my thumbprint. If I place the Mississippi River around the top of my thumb and Lake Pontchartrain at the bottom of the first knuckle, I understand exactly why the city's streets are curved and asymmetrical, why indeed some streets abruptly end beneath a trestle or at a canal, then begin again like something chasing its tail. Mid-City, where I live, cuts right across the center of my thumb embodying the below-sea-level bowl between the river and the lake. When it rains we park our cars on the grassy neutral ground that is raised and runs down the center of the street.

This spring I have had many visitors and the most interesting has been the photographer, Luca, who comes from Verona. He is perhaps the best kind of visitor to have

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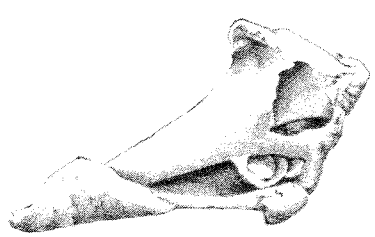
because he has come to look at something he has never seen before. My house is a deep surprise for him—*What is this?* he calls through the front door, where he can see every other room lined up in succession. The house I live in is called a shotgun. It is the narrowest house imaginable and is sometimes no wider than its front door and mailbox. Supposedly I could stand at my front door, take aim, and fire my gun through the back door, given that the back door is open—the house is that straight. But I don't have a gun, and in actuality I live in a sawed-off double-barreled shotgun, which means the house is a duplex and the owner converted my last room into somebody else's studio. And I don't have a camel-back. I point across the street to show Luca the funny, recessed second story of a shotgun. That's a camel-back.

The shotgun is like an optical illusion; living in one gives me the sensation of living in many different places besides a house. Sometimes such large parties pour out the front of one that I am reminded of Nanook's kayak in "Nanook of the North," when his large family surprisingly climbed out of his little boat. As a northerner, however, I find this linear dimension a curious way to live. To reach the kitchen I must travel through every room of the house. It's a little like walking back through train cars and feeling both intrusive and nosy about what the other passengers are doing. The sensation is also a little nautical; it's easy, in fact, to think of the rows and rows of white or rose or blue-colored shotguns as houseboats docked at the curb. When you look at my thumb you can see that New Orleans is surrounded by water, which seems to set everything adrift or askew. Somehow the water, the bright houses bobbing in the sunlight, and the dark, overhanging live oaks draw people to the outside. Perhaps the privacy of closed-off rooms seems less important when so much life can be had in the courtyards, patios, open markets, balconies and street-side cafes that fill New Orleans. This week the magnolia blossoms opened their enormous ivory cups and I remembered the time I cut one down to keep inside my house. By next morning the blossom had melted and turned gray as a mushroom. What keeps in a house? In the north we kept the rooms upstairs warm and suspicious.

All winter and spring New Orleans has been preparing for her 1984 World Exposition. It is not surprising that this city chose to have a world's fair, because it is a city in love with festivals and carnival. Appropriately, the theme of the Fair is "The World of Rivers"—a celebration of what is most plentiful and most perilous to this city. This celebration is a little like the city's love for Carnival, whose mixture of Mardi-Gras pageantry, worship, extravagance, humor and masquerade derives as much from the Easter calendar and rite of spring, as it does from the development of secret and private social organizations. The celebration of water in New Orleans is every bit as paradoxical, for we honor both its natural and mythical characteristics. With the beginning of Lent comes the rising of the river, to replenish and endanger. We live below sea-level. We live by the strength of levees. We live where water boils faster. We live where the presence of great waters and the negation of altitude and the spring-into-summer daily rains make our summer city one of the hottest and most humid in the country. Many wonder why we are having the Fair during the heat, when the air turns to jelly and the Mardi-Gras ball season was originally banned because of the pestilence.

I like the heat. I like its exotic character, its fleshy presence, its superiority. I like its explanation of life here. The dim, sultry nights in Tennessee Williams' plays are true. The nights are not only romantic and breathless, but they hold everything close and fragrant and tangible. They are permanent as memory because they don't give up. In the afternoon, when the heat is white, we draw the shades and sleep the heat off. Or soak in a steamy bath, Blanche Dubois. It's a character you will get to know, and will have to give in to, because like everything else in New Orleans it is excessive; it is abundance.

For a day, Luca and I drive south into the bayous, to Bayou Gauche and to Cut Off. The bayous are thick-banked with blackberry bushes and snowy egrets stalking upstream. Fish-camp towns line a road-width strip of land. Here cabins or cottages seem barely attached to the marshy land, no more so than the fat-bottomed shrimp boats docked opposite each house. They are two houses or two boats. We can see how the lip of the bayou water sits *above* what ground there is. It's as if somebody has slipped pennies into a glass of water, to get the water to rise unbelievably above the edge and not spill. Geography becomes clear: the delta region spreads out, the swampy web of the bayous—we're at the river's mouth. Men feed their families by working this mouth. And what feeds the river? It's all mud and flood. Luca thinks we'll sink. He's waiting to see an alligator before the light changes. But we don't, not today.



When we return to New Orleans we go to Casamento's to eat oysters. Casamento's is a small neighborhood restaurant nearly hidden by the Woolworth's storefront on Magazine Street. This part of Magazine is full of clumsy looking wood-framed houses and warehouses. It's beginning to be the best area in the city to seek out art galleries—especially photography—antique shops, records and wine. But it's after six and only the red letters of Woolworth's glow open, extending the hours of dusk. Inside Casamento's we have the feeling of being underwater. Perhaps inside a fishtank. The floor and walls are nearly all white tile, shining and clean. There is a great distance between the floor and the ceiling, so much that the few tables lining the wall seem shy. I love the spareness of this place and the simplicity of the food that comes to the table. After the two bottles of Dixie, an oval plate of fried oysters, a dish of lemons, a cup of ketchup and horseradish and a plate of toasted white bread is served. Somehow we don't want anything else.

The earliest sign of the impending Fair is that we have been having our streets repaired. New Orleans' streets are in such horrible condition that it's almost laughable; they look as streets might look that have been submerged for centuries: split open, sunken in some areas, absurdly bumpy in others—as if some violent current flowed beneath, and not on top. In some parts of the city the streets simply evaporate, revert back to dirt. In other parts people claim

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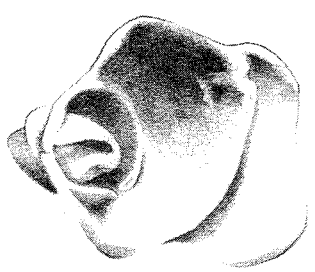
there are pot-holes so deep they can look down into the sea. I believe this; most of my young students have written poems about this phenomenon. The streets are archeological wonders, disclosing layers of engineering history. What I like best are the layers of shells that have been pressed down in the foundation, how they remain white and whole and probably contribute to the street's great porous shiftings. It's pleasant to think how many uses this city has for its crustaceans. The embedded road-beds are created out of what cannot be eaten, a natural foundation on which to build a city near the sea. We imagine large, empty city trucks backing into the restaurants at night, carrying off the shells of our food to fill in the dark pot-holes.

Now, though we have shiny, black-topped streets everywhere, and the facades of many houses are being scrubbed with the habit of spring, most neighborhoods retain the dreamy, softly decaying appearance that is somehow quietly preserved, I think from within. The ancient frame cottages and shotguns and the worn brick and stone walls look like something that comes out of boiled saltwater and months of hot sun. The impression is langorous and beautiful and reminds me of some small Mexican towns where decay reveals another kind of beauty. It's as if the wood, which often looks like smooth plaster, and the brick and stone were taking shape and color out of the ground and water they stand on. It is the paradox of abundance: by mid-summer we are almost drowning in foliage and the sweet scent of decay. On the bookcase books swell to twice their size and mosquitoes simmer in the semi-tropical gardens of Aubudon Park and City Park. But the decay is not permanent, it is a measure of the impossibility of stopping life.

Over the next few days I am with Luca as he takes more and more photographs. I want him to go into the cemeteries with me. Not the cemeteries, he says. Perhaps they are too impressive, too profuse—but I am compelled by the structure of the cemeteries here and by the explanation for the peculiar above-ground tombs. We do visit some. We drive first to one of the oldest St. Louis Cemeteries which is lodged at the top of the Quarter and is directly below the expressway. The afternoon light is dry and hot and the white stucco walls of the tombs make everything nearly too bright to see. In two months it will almost be too humid to walk. But we walk now among the dead who are buried above ground because there is so much water below ground and surrounding us that they would be in danger of floating away.

There are maybe fifteen men renovating the tombs. They stare at us, we them. We have cameras, but they have shovels, drills, plastering pans, giant spatulas. (The Fair has caused great amounts of renovation, though perservation of the dead here is a curious problem.) We walk to the north corner where one worker leans against his shovel, which is stuck in a fresh mound of dirt and shattered brick. He smokes. Overhead, the I-10 traffic flies past into the afternoon. I ask about the repair work. We can see this row of tombs is open, fallen open, that he has been shoveling out the crumbled structures. They'll re-brick them, then re-stucco the front and give them new whitewash. But what about the bodies of these tombs? Isn't there family that claims these? Not any longer, over 200 years old. And the bodies, well . . . he points to the dirt and brick we're standing on. Luca and I peer into one of the open tombs. We



poke around the dirt with a stick. Yes. Here's a thigh bone. Plate of glass from the casket. Brass handles. Everything is dry, loose, comes apart easily. Luca sifts the dirt with the glass till he uncovers a very fine, thin rosary. Why it occurs to us to take the rosary, I'm not sure. It seems all right, no more of a disturbance to the privacy of the grave than the weather or the cemetery worker. The beads are like tiny glass peas, the chain silver, crumbling. Luca places it in a tin we found. (Another friend, horrified at our "crime" guaranteed we'd have three pieces of bad luck for our cold curiosity; thirty minutes later the clutch gave out on my car.) The last thing he did before leaving New Orleans was to stop by another cemetery. This was near the lake, a newer cemetery, trimmed clean and vast. Luca placed the rosary inside another vault, one with room for three generations to come.

BREAD

Luca tells us that in Italy a town is identified by its bread; maybe it's braided or flat, unsalted or plain round loaves that a town boasts. Who in the States asks, when a friend returns from Peoria or Harrisburg, *Did you try some of their bread?* Sunbeam, Holsum, Bunny Bread? In the south, for some reason, it's particularly difficult to find good bread, and for me (when I lived in Alabama) it became a perpetual struggle. Hard rolls, dark rye, bagels, were rare and coveted. But here, when friends visit, I have been known to indulge them in a Zip Bread and butter and café au lait feast. The Leidenheimer Baking Company bakes feisty, crisp baguettes and fatter Italian loaves every day. The name of this bread, in red and blue letters, is *Zip*. Every morning the grocery store bread shelves are stuffed with the long, paper-wrapped loaves. It's cheap bread and it stays fresh for less than one day, like something evanescent. In New Orleans people like to make a sandwich called a poor boy, for which they slice big chunks of this bread. It is also a fine thing to eat the bread with red beans and rice. That way you will be eating three New Orleanian staples at the same time.

Now we're eating Zip bread and chocolate and I'm making coffee, New Orleans coffee. Luca says I have a "giant" coffee machine. It's just an old stainless steel one handed down from my mother, but it makes the local coffee pretty well. Luca's friends have one of the lovely white enamel pots with the long curved spout and small cup on top where the coffee is placed. An authentic New Orleans coffee pot, he says, but he doesn't like the coffee. Here the coffee is blended with chicory. Once I too disliked it; I thought the chicory was some sort of tobacco and didn't trust the coffee's deep black color. Now I can't separate the soft bitter taste from my life here.

Down on the river, in the Quarter, the Cafe du Monde makes this coffee with steamed milk, 24 hours a day. They serve it with beignets that are hot and heaped in powered sugar. I tell Luca if he needs

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a place to sit where there is a little light and it is dawn, or earlier, then the Cafe is a good place. At that time of day you are much closer to the river because of the heavy dawn mist, and you can hear the gulls pitching their calls above the empty streets. When it's cold, the waiters pull down the green canvas awnings and you feel as though you're having your coffee inside a big circus tent. But when the awnings are rolled up, there is much to watch from your Decatur Street seat. Behind you, behind the levee there, the Mississippi flows as brown and silent as the café au lait, and you can go watch the ships, watch the sun rise on the red and yellow warehouses that line the shore. You will think this is a Hopper painting.

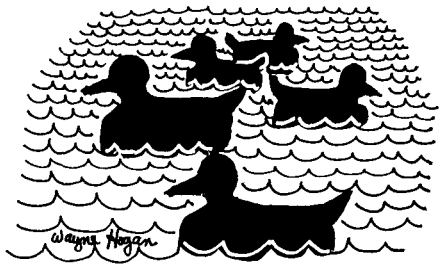
Luca cooks for us almost every night. He claims he is a terrible cook and rarely cooks for himself, but when I visit Luca and his friends in the evening he is always just bursting in the door with sacks of vegetables, seafood or chicken, cheeses, pasta, wine. Then he commences to "kitchen" as he calls it, while we drink the wine and listen for the steeple bells across Esplanade.

We help Luca shell the crawfish for the rice—he's found good ones, freshly steamed and picante from the seasoned boil. Luca is delighted with the rice here. It's grown in Louisiana and all of its varieties are easy to find. The chicken is simmering in lemon and garlic, beneath the weight of bricks, pots, books . . . It must be *pressed*, he claims, for "chicken diablo." Liza, he says, you make the salad dressing—and he produces a bottle of beautiful green, cold pressed olive oil. This is the olive oil found at Central Grocery, a fragrant, tough old Italian store down in the Quarter. Besides the best olive oils you can also buy home-made pastas, dried, salted fish, Italian candies, sacks of lovely orange lentils, or black beans or favas, imported canned goods and muffelata sandwiches made with salami, provolone and Greek olives. Down the street begins the open-air market where the freshest Creole produce is sold in the city. Blood-oranges, tangerines, satsumas, are grown in Louisiana and so is the garlic—Creole garlic, big-toe garlic, great purple braids of garlic hang like prizes. Sweet Creole tomatoes, fresh bay leaves, artichokes, avocados, mirlitons, boxes of okra, spring onions and red chilis: it's easy to figure out what Creole cooking is, or what Cajun food is; watch what people buy and ask them the best way to prepare this. The produce sellers will tell you. The men who drive the little open produce trucks through neighborhoods will tell you. Ask at the curbside markets. With these rivers of food, baskets and tables stacked with purple, green, yellow and red you must believe the people adamant, if not a little proud, about cooking. Luca's meals are never quite Creole or New Orleans in the traditional manner—but they epitomize the spirit of cooking here: fresh herbs, seafood, tomatoes, and hot, hot red spice.

DREAM STATE

Some days we ride the streetcar out of the Quarter. The streetcar reminds me of visits to the boardwalk during my summers in the northeast and I know why. The cars are old and open like the antique carousel at Asbury Park and when I pay my 60¢ I feel like I'm boarding some slow-moving amusement ride. There are heavily varnished wooden seats, the faint smell of creosote and the heavy windows that are easy to lift open. It is the best place to be during the daily afternoon shower. I open my window half-way to let the rain and the rain smell and the breeze and the wheels' rough song take me out of the humid, 100-degree day. I have friends who claim they ride the streetcar for hours, book or notebook in hand. The streetcar travels slowly down the grassy island of St. Charles Avenue, to the river, then up Carrolton Avenue. Joggers pass by, the traffic passes by and you feel, somehow, that it's better to be in the streetcar in New Orleans than driving a car of your own. Cars seem incongruous here, while the streetcar or walking or river and bayou traffic seem right, necessary.

Sometimes I call St. Charles the avenue of palms. Palm trees always surprise me, probably because they're the last thing I'd expect to see growing in the northern towns where I'm from. They are the giraffe of trees, rising tall and singular above the live oaks' dark tangled limbs. Now most of the city's palms have been stripped of their brown, burned fronds caused by the January freeze. They seem more interesting than ever, knobby, totemic figures with a few new green feathers sticking out at the crown.



Traveling down St. Charles Avenue we pass by the most enchanting houses in New Orleans. In the Garden District we begin to fantasize our life inside these bundles of turrets, balconies, widow's walks, the secretive dormered rooms, tearooms, cupolas and the profusion of rose and azalea and lily gardens. They are houses invented out of fairy tales, straight from the Black Forest, out of kingdoms of holiday towns. They are children's houses and are constantly being attended to: gardeners, painters, roofers replacing the terra-cotta tiles; maids, delivery men. They ask so much to look so pretty. Grand and funny, they sit apart from the rows of shotguns and the squat brick cottages of the Quarter. They are dominant as the Mississippi.

Luca and I get out at Audubon Park; from here we can walk south to the Zoo and then to the batture. Luca thinks this city is more European than American because the people have built such grand and beautiful parks for passing through the afternoon. On the other side of the city from us, and near where Luca stays, is City Park, one of the largest city parks in this country. New Orleans Museum of Art forms the entrance, and behind it are the countless long walks to be taken around the ponds, playing fields, to the old wooden carousel and to the rose garden which is surrounded by a tall, iron fence. What I like best there is the work the WPA did in the park, the federalist architecture that is visible in the foot bridges, benches and the lithe deco "Diana" who stands on a rock in one of the ponds with her broken bow.

But I walk here in Audubon Park nearly every day and would like sometime to live in one of the old, airy apartments that face the park. And the ducks are very agreeable. They live on the island in the center of the pond with two snowy egrets and several families of turtles who line up like children, smallest to largest, across the fallen cedar logs.

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Most of the ducks are white and fat, but there are some wood-colored ones, and presently, some ducklings who are kept moving out of the reach of the alligator's jaws. The egrets are painfully attentive to all of life: their necks stretch out of their bodies like exclamation points. And the ducks, the city's grateful orphans, waddle out of the water on their rubbery palms, larger than some of the children who shriek at them. They shriek back, they shriek in laughter, all of them at the same time. They shriek at Luca's camera.

Inside Audubon Zoo there is a sign next to the elephant's house:

Elephant
No Show Today

But it seems no one has told the elephant. She is here before us, swaying and rocking, her broad head tipped back, her eyes shut tight. Where is she? Where are we? I can see across a seemingly great distance the open grass plains of central Africa, and I, like the gentle zebras and the rhinoceros, the wild boar nosing dirt clods, the ostriches standing akimbo, I too am filled with the happy illusion of open space. Across the plain, at the edge of the boggy swamp, twenty or thirty flamingos graze like enormous trumpeted lilies. Rooted in the marsh, they twist and bend their stem-like necks till there is nothing but pink and salmon and white flowers everywhere—here where a hundred years ago the land was neither park nor zoo but the site for the "World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition, 1884-1885."

With the sun going down, Luca and I head down to the batture, on the other side of the levee. We sit and watch for the ships sailing in or sailing out. It is something to get this close to boats as ponderous and monumentally large as these. Their foreign names and letters and flags are beautiful and when they are directly before us they are splitting the river in two, between Algiers and the French Quarter. Suddenly there is this terrifically large ship passing by, the river bank feels cartoonish, feels black and white while only the ship is color, a movie of itself.

Some days I board the commuter ferry that docks at the bottom of Canal St. and travels over to Algiers. This ride is grand because there is a great deal of effort and engine noise spent in the launching, and because the ferry is so broad and awkward for its brief journey. But to get out into the middle of the river and look back into the city as the current drags you into the bend, is to be inside that glass of water again. The dream of life below sea-level is humbling. Here is the business of the river, its economy, its motion, its abundance—from here we can see the new architecture of the fair rising up beside the Quarter, beside the river, in a place that cannot easily let go of things. Here is the force of plenty: water—the opposite of the desert where almost nothing remains in the constant and airless wind. The river is not lovely here; it is not blue or clear. It is full of mud and fog and it is absolutely compelling.

Luca and I return to the Quarter where we enter the Napoleon House and order two Dixies. I complain to the waiter that they've given in to the pressure of the Fair by raising the price of their 90¢ beers—though I know change takes place slowly here. The beer had been 90¢ for years. But I doubt they will have many fair-goers walking into these dimly-lit unpainted rooms. The Napoleon House is a secret bar that is really no secret at all. Everyone knows the management will do almost anything to discourage business. The waiters are temperamental, the sandwiches are ordinary (despite the recent investment in menus which feature color photographs of the food; they remind me of the Tennessee Driver's Examination, which is all pictorial in case the would-be licensee is illiterate.) and the cavernous walls echo the sounds of chairs, bottles, plank tables, traffic noise that the open french doors invite, echoes it all in a crescendo that sometimes out-does the classical music that plays heartfully on and on. There are fewer places in the city I would rather be. Behind the front room is another that is more private. White table cloths, one small fish tank that offers the only color—behind that, the patio. On the patio three stories of balconied rooms rise above us. There are a few large and spikey potted plants and a shadowy staircase in the corner. It is easy to spend whole afternoons in this place. It is a very safe place to wait for the evening to pass on—and it does, through the square of sky above the patio, its blue theater lights backlighting the windows upstairs.

I remember coming here during the time of parades before Mardi-Gras day. We had just been released from the feverish, heady crowds along Canal Street. First a cornucopia of grapes, then maidens and princes, then Bacchus himself floated past down into the neon-night streets. The floats were elaborate, extraordinarily large and bright; Bacchus lifted his mechanical arm up and down, up and down, to sip his chalice of wine. We could not deny the power of the crowd, of a body created of thousands of masked people and the parade itself. The gaudy surrealism, the flung beads, the silent, milky night sky; all of it was ours. When the crowd broke we walked into the Napoleon House where the parade, the crush of people and brass horns evaporated. A few people sat at the bar. Pachelbel's Canon in D played somewhere above us.

Recently I drove north through Mississippi where I had my first glimpse of how the outside world (as local as that may be) was preparing for the New Orleans World Exposition. I saw tropically-painted billboards advertising the pleasures of the Gulf Coast beaches, or invitations to visit the plantation towns of Natchez or Vicksburg—while visiting the Fair. Indeed, these places are lovely, but I began thinking about the parts of New Orleans that already encourage tourism and how they will unashamedly be luring visitors into their schemes and convincing many that this *is* New Orleans. I think that most people are not satisfied with being told what to do—and that can happen easily in a foreign place. Bourbon Street and the glut of t-shirt shops that've sprung out of the Decatur Street area are not the heart of this city. When we want to see what's behind the most mysterious door, we do not always choose the loudest and brightest one. The raw, hard-core night life, the garish, titillating intensity of Bourbon Street does not come out of the countless strip bars with their mirrors and $5 drinks, or the tired Dixieland music and velvety restaurants (indeed, many say this is no more serious than a stroll down a boardwalk); rather it is derived from the quality of life that is felt in the *effort* of Bourbon Street. The effort is seen in the desperation to sell something, the desperation to see something—and the effort of concealing disappointment. The spectacle, Luca says, comes from watching the crowds. —*Elizabeth Thomas*

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LYNDA K. HULL

AUTUMN, MIST

1.

This morning I took the wine from the sill
glazed perfectly in ice. It smoked down my throat,
mist across autumn fields I left in Maine
thirty years ago. I asked the mirror
if this is what it means: another room
known by heart, the Charles below
accepting everything. The city I saw on postcards
was a lie. Those shots from above, all light.

And Father my face is yours,
the way I last saw you flickering
in the doorway, tired as your eighty acres
of salt marsh and scrub pine.
Meaningless to say you were right;
the night my feet failed on the stage
of a Park Square bar, I knew it.
The men didn't look up from their drinks.

This morning, tracing wrinkles from
nose to chin, I imagined them folding forever
into darkness.
Fields, dance floors—same thing—places where soil
or rhythm breaks down, where we turn in darkness
to meet ourselves.

2.

It was such a simple act,
the most precise.
The fingers on the razor
might have belonged to someone else.
Over the bed, the crack in the ceiling
like the border of a country
I could never quite recall. Water rushes
in pipes, the drain needs fixing.
In the dark, it doesn't matter.
My dancing shoes, worn down at the heels
lean against each other in the closet.

Jacques will creep
up the stairs, shoes in hand, tired
from waiting tables. He steps so lightly
as if his late return is a matter of concern.
He should always be serving, always be leaning
over candles, eyes mauved in strained circles.

He'll bring rolls in white paper
as always. Tomorrow, he'll unpin the print
from the wall. Picasso—a woman ironing,
everything falling in blue gravity,
so tired, as if she desires only to sink
from the weight of her body.

3.

And perhaps, the body
really is a gift, this small beating
in my ribs, a reasoned rhythm. Once, a woman
at the museum reminded me of a harp. Her supple spine
defined a frame. She was so tense, I could see wires
as if at any moment she would become music
or break. The way moonlight broke itself

in our window when as children
we sisters cut each other's hair.
Mary and I found a moth trapped in butter—
wings
a purple diagram of stopped motion.

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Imaginary Confrontations:

W. Allen before "Broadway Danny Rose"

He came up from the subway at 57th St. looking short and skinny and goggle-eyed, just like he portrays himself.

"Listen, Prince," I said, "it's time to wake up, forget those malted-milk moviegirls and get yourself kissed by a nice twocents-plain who'll lift the spell, set you free from the endless years of psychosyrupy, not to mention tennis balls."

He stopped. "You've been standing here rehearsing that line?"

"Well no," I said, "I wasn't sure what I'd say, but as for effort I've been standing here three months, twenty-seven days, and—let's see—seventy-six minutes. Which makes you just about on time."

He bent his neck, which is his way of squinting. He moved a little closer, to get me more surely under his glasses.

"I have a laws of probability brother-in-law," I said. "He worked it out on a mainframe after hours. His reckoning was that if I stood here on 57th St. from ten to four weekdays, but not when it was windy, it was 93.236 certain or likely that you would show up within a four-month period. And here you are. What a coincidence."

He stepped back, took off his glasses, cleaned them with a Kleenex, put them back on.

"So," he said, "you want to be a comedian."

"No," I said, "not especially, though it's likely I am one."

"You want my autograph," he said.

"Sure," I said. "There's a tattoo place down on 43rd. Do you have time?"

He shook his head, which made his lips move. "I think it's Ingmar Bergman you want to meet," he said.

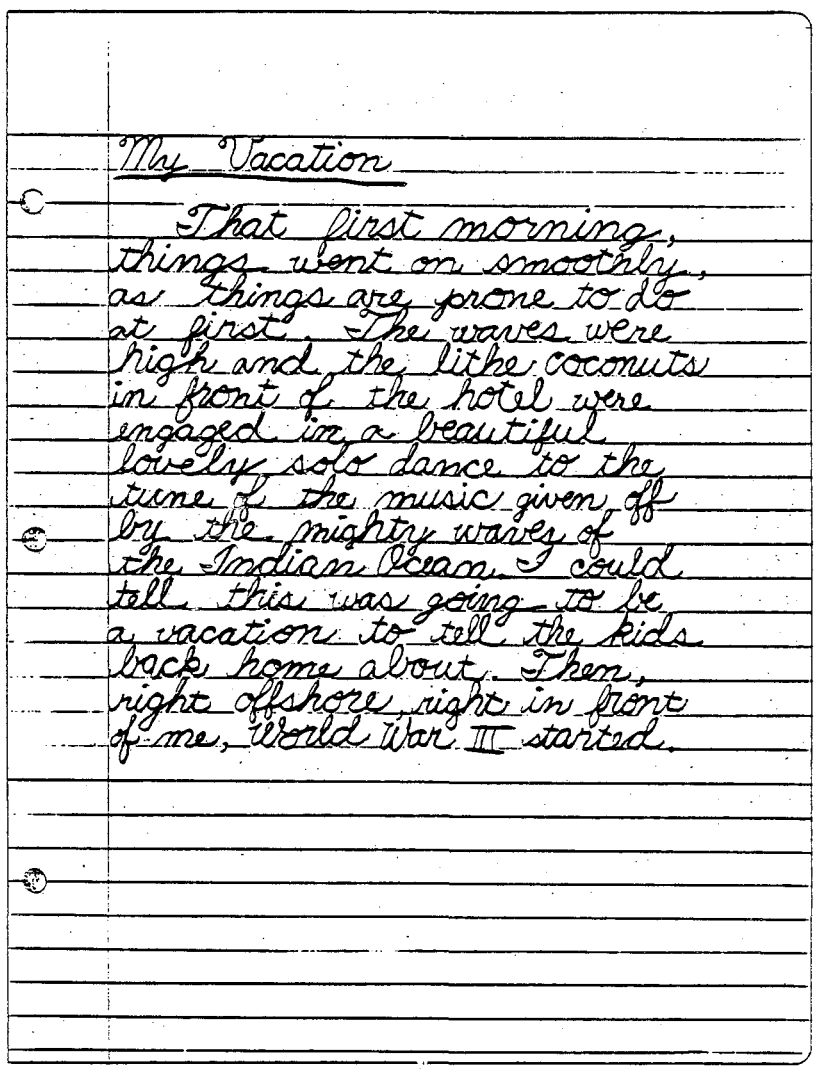
I shook mine and smiled. "No," I said, "though that's something I'd like to talk to you about, that if he'd been born in Coney Island under the roller coaster he'd have made movies something like yours. A little more raw, only. "Schmucks of a Summer Night." As it is, his best bet is to marry Fellini, whereas yours—do you want to hear a story?"

He gave me that shrug that pulls his forehead down like a window shade.

"This nice young couple were walking through one of those huge parking lots at a suburban mall when they heard a cat crying and scratching at a car window. It was a hot summer day and someone had left the cat in the car with all the windows shut tight, the cat was being baked. They couldn't stand not to do anything about it. They tried the door. It opened, the cat jumped out and ran like hell. They looked all over, couldn't find it. They were standing in the sun panting when they heard a squeal and a crash. Someone had tried to avoid the cat in the parking lot but didn't. It was dead. The couple were desperately upset. They picked up the dead cat, put it in a shopping bag, and went back to the car, put the bag down, and sat in the shade of another car, waiting for the cat's owner to return. An old lady came by, grabbed up the bag and walked off. They were running after her when she opened the bag to see what she had, saw the dead cat, and had a heart attack. The couple were standing over her, protectively, when the ambulance came. The attendants rolled her onto a stretcher and slid her into the ambulance. While the couple were staring after her, one of the attendants ran back, picked up the bag, and tucked it in next to her in the ambulance. . . ."

He was staring at me. "And so on," he said.

"Exactly," I said.


My Vacation
That first morning, things went on smoothly, as things are prone to do at first. The waves were high and the lithe coconuts in front of the hotel were engaged in a beautiful lovely solo dance to the tune of the music given off by the mighty waves of the Indian Ocean. I could tell this was going to be a vacation to tell the kids back home about. Then, right offshore, right in front of me, World War III started.

M. KASPER

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I already made that movie," he said.

"Yes," I said, "why do you keep breaking out into Bergmaniac films?"

"I had this acne so bad it was criminal," he said. "I ordered Cort-aid and they sent me somebody from the public defender's office."

"A girl," I said. "A lass, with a budding talent that won't open. Understudy in a musical. You understand understudies. There's a logical step beyond that, you know. Ever thought of promoters?"

"I thought about them a lot at P.S. 39."

"Agents. *Provocateurs*. People who can see in the night. They're great story tellers so you have a tale about the telling of tales. Or selling of. For instance, there was this girl with a big nose who was a tennis star—"

"Never mind. No more stories. Especially no Jewish stories. That kind of help I don't need. Let's walk, I'm late for the delicatessen scene."

I fell in beside him.

"How come you let that one slide by?" he said. "Too proud? Or you know about the new movie I'm making?"

"You can't be proud if you're a comedian," I said. "Only vain."

"So you're a high class one-liner. Is that what you want to do? Write voice-over for my movies?"

"Lottie Dod," I said, using Diane's voice, "Lottie Dod."

He laughed. He put his hands on his knees and laughed.

"There," I said. I touched him gently on the shoulder and walked away. It was doubtful he knew who she was.

SANDRA ALCOSSER

IN THE COUNTRY

Once I was the world's ugly little girl,
dressed in green tulle, waving
like a rue anemone, I rode through
a parade in a black Mercedes.

Saturday nights while an entire city
paired off without me, I danced with a chicken
in the Chinese Arcade. Hours he spun in a glass cage
for his brief ration of grain.

How much easier, life in the country.
Warm coat, handsome socks and one stops
longing for company. The meadow crowds with blue
grouse, silver-leafed balsam root and below

a whole lush valley. Never have I felt
unloved in the forest or lonely. Black cats
stalk the cabin each night like gentlemen
in tuxedos and I find them in first light

spread out in the grasses and clover. Each one
has his legs wound about his own body and his tail
slung over his shoulder
like the arm of an old friend.

Pauline Kael, often an interesting film critic, and just as often a one-woman argument against paying writers by the word, says that Woody Allen no longer tells us about ourselves as he did in the seventies because the culture has changed. I hope she meant to say the *attention* of our culture, for if "culture" has any word-substance left after decades of use by critics as a kind of funny putty, it does not "change" very quickly. It does, in our half of this century, periodically find new ways to picture itself, or have new ways thrust upon it.

For "Broadway Danny Rose" to have hit—or even grazed—this decade's center of attention as Woody's psychodramas did for the Me-and-My-Mirror seventies, Danny should have been a wildly stimulated hacker sitting in front of his IBM (Irving Botkin Machines) causing and being caused great mischief. The essential comedy of any time is to be found in the "truths" of that time (Chaplin, W.C. Fields), since accepted truths are largely frozen thought handed down for home defrosting. The grotesque scene at the table has the dark side that comedy must always show. (Literal examples in Allen's films: the dining table at the midwest home of Diane Keaton's family, or the Coney Island under-the-roller-coaster home of Woody's family. Non-literal examples from life: almost any speech by almost anyone haranguing us about almost anything.)

Allen was such an extraordinary marksman as The Psychologist in Spite of Himself. The ways in which, taking painfully careful aim at life he invariably shot himself in the foot, were wondrous indeed. I want him to be wondrous again, but I worry. In his earlier time truth was in the microscope, not the microchip. What was funny was the hopeless infatuation with questions. What is becoming funny is the scheduled mass wedding with answers.

—*Kenneth Lash*

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PHILIP APPLEMAN

FROM DARWIN'S ARK

Prologue

Animals tame and animals feral
prowled the Dark Ages in search of a moral:
the canine was Loyal, the lion was Virile,
rabbits were Potent and gryphons were Sterile.
Sloth, Envy, Gluttony, Pride—every peril
was fleshed into something phantasmic and rural,
while Courage, Devotion, Thrift—every bright laurel
crowned a creature in some mythological mural.

Scientists think there is something immoral
in singular brutes having meat that is plural:
beasts are mere beasts, just as flowers are floral.
Yet between the lines there's an implicit demurral;
the habit stays with us, albeit it's puerile:
when Darwin saw squirrels, he saw more than Squirrel.

The Worm

Eyeless in Gaza, earless in Britain,
lower than a rattlesnake's belly-button,
deaf as a judge and dumb as an audit:
nobody gave the worm much credit
till Darwin looked a little closer
at this spaghetti-torsoed loser.
Look, he said, a worm can feel
and taste and touch and learn and smell;
and ounce for ounce, they're tough as wrestlers,
and love can turn them into hustlers,
and as to work, their labors are mythic,
small devotees of the Protestant Ethic:
they'll go anywhere, to mountains or grassland,
south to the rain forests, north to Iceland,
fifty thousand to every acre
guzzling earth like a drunk on liquor,
churning the soil and making it fertile,
earning the thanks of every mortal:
proud *Homo sapiens*, with legs and arms—
his whole existence depends on worms.
So, History, no longer let
the worm's be an ignoble lot
unwept, unhonored, and unsung.
Moral: even a worm can turn.

The Gossamer

Sixty miles from land the gentle trades
that silk the Yankee clippers to Cathay
sift a million gossamers, like tides
of fluff above the menace of the sea.

These tiny spiders spin their bits of webbing
and ride the air as schooners ride the ocean;
the *Beagle* trapped a thousand in its rigging,
small aeronauts on some elusive mission.

The Megatherium, done to extinction
by its own bigness, makes a counterpoint
to gossamers, who breath us this small lesson:
for survival, it's the little things that count.

The Rabbit

a. Except in distress, the rabbit is silent,
but social as teacups: no hare is an island.
(Moral:
silence is golden—or anyway harmless;
rabbits may run, but never for Congress.)

b. When a rabbit gets miffed, he bounds in an orbit,
kicking and scratching like—well, like a rabbit.
(Moral:
to thine own self be true—or as true as you can;
a wolf in sheep's clothing fleeces his skin.)

c. He populates prairies and mountains and moors,
but in Sweden the rabbit can't live out of doors.
(Moral:
to know your own strength, take a tug at your shackles;
to understand purity, ponder your freckles.)

d. Survival developed these small furry tutors;
the morals of rabbits outnumber their litters.
(Conclusion:
you needn't be brainy, benign, or bizarre
to be thought a great prophet. Endure. Just endure.)

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SUDDEN MODELING

DAVID KRANES

Who was Anne? what was Love? and what did it all have to do with an eight-foot eggplant? Hunt walked out onto the ice of his New Hampshire lake and wondered.

His agent, Suskind in New York, loved his recent work. "Fruits and vegetables! Fruits and vegetables! Brilliant! Hot! Banks love fruits! Hospitals love vegetables! Brilliant! Very sexy! Do a series of *breads*!" But what did Suskind know about the extemporaneous heart? The sudden clots to the brain. The stoppage of air: panicked, unventilated choking. *I'm confused, you asshole!* Hunt had wanted to shout over the phone to his agent, the man jacking him up and off with lines like: "Modern classic! Dutch masters! Giant fucking Cezanne!" But how do you explain blood to a man ecstatic about macrocosmic endives?

Hunt was stupid about Women. In the February wind, on this scrabbled ice, halfway across the bay, his Irish knit Leah'd made tangling its yellowed wool in his hair and by his mouth, Hunt confessed that: "I am a stupid person about women"; and the words, out, were

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immediately steam. He was stupid about Leah, who was real. He was stupid about Anne, a passionate but distant . . . what? *direction, possible* direction, an *idea*: "Do you really know who I am?!" she'd written him. So Hunt was stupid about Reality, and he was stupid about Ideas: He was making avocados into monuments; What was left?

Hunt cast back, to a tiny two-story house near the coast in Rockport and a woman named Martha. It was a time before Leah, a May when he was only twenty-four and a young painter and admitting to being stupid about women even before he *became* stupid, had made it habit. He had been in Boston on a day bringing slides to galleries trying to interest them and was stopped at Schrafft's having a cup of tea when he saw this woman enter, sit near him with a package from *Bonwit's*. And Hunt had thought that she was of extraordinary beauty, in a hidden-lonely-sad way, an almost secret way, and he had looked and looked at her, unable to stop, unable to piece together in himself what it was about her, no *within* her, that so stirred him. And when he had risen to leave, he stopped by her table.

"Whatever that is that you're drinking . . . it's the most incredible green."

"It's lime. It's a lime freeze," she had said.

"Lime freeze," Hunt had repeated.

"Yes."

"Listen . . ." Hunt had *leapt*, one of the elements in his stupidity, "I'm a painter." And he had spilled three slides of portraits on the table before her. "Those are slides of my paintings. This is terrible light, but if you hold them up, you can get some idea. I'm a painter and I have to say I've been watching you, looking at you, I'm sorry, staring. I'd like to paint you, if that would be possible. Here, on this napkin, let me write my name and address; I live up in Rockport. I'd be very happy to have you model for me. Pay. I'm not in the habit of this. Just snaring people. But . . . Do what you want. I'm sure you will. Next Wednesday would be great. If you can get away. I'm not a maniac or anything. I'm just a painter. And I guess impulsive. Obviously. I just find you very . . . I don't know what the word is: striking, compelling. My name is Hunt."

"Martha," the woman'd said, taking Hunt's extended hand. Her jaw was agape, and it was like she was trying to recall the rest of her name, "Martha . . . McAllister."

"Well it's nice to meet you, Martha." Hunt smiled and felt, not even boyish: *child*ish; "You're really . . . *arresting*, I guess is the word! And that . . . float or whatever it is, freeze, is an incredible green."

"Thank you," Martha McAllister had said.

"Well, Wednesday, if you can make it," Hunt said, drawing away. "If not, I'll certainly understand that not everybody is crazy."

It was a Friday, and Hunt had driven back to Rockport, the woman, Martha's, image clinging to the screen of his mind like smoke to wool. He would have guessed her age near thirty. He had seen a wedding ring. He hadn't thought to ask her where she lived. He hadn't thought to ask *any*thing or to say that he lived without telephone. The next day he had walked along the rocks and wondered if she'd come. Hunt had done a sketch of a Portugee fisherman eating his lunch beside the nets. He had gone to the library and discovered that there were at least a thousand McAllisters in all the various suburban directories. He had seen something *alive* in her. That was the best of his articulation. No: He did better: *buried alive*; the intuition scared him. He had seen something alive, not yet emerged, and he had leapt toward it.

Was that part of the pattern? Hunt wondered. From early in? Was that a chief component of the mix of women and his stupidity?

So he had thought about her and not thought about her, had her in his mind and yet set apart. And when the knock on the door downstairs had come shortly after nine on the Wednesday following, it both surprised and seemed absolutely natural to him.

"Well, hello," Hunt had said.

And Martha McAllister's eyes had been so hopeful and so terrified. "Hello."

"Come in. Please come in. My studio—well, 'studio,' that's a bit of an enlargement, where I paint's just up these stairs."

"I'm a married woman," Martha McAllister had said.

"I saw your ring," Hunt had smiled.

"I just needed to say that."

"Right. Would you rather go?"

"No; I just needed to say that."

"Come on up. Would you like some tea?"

"I have two children in school."

And she was following him, now, up the stairs. "Great. Boys? Girls?"

"Both. I mean, one of each."

"I'm unmarried. I don't have any children. But I'm twenty-four; so. . ."

"I'm thirty-one."

"Congratulations."

"—So, this is where you paint?"

"Well, it's light. And I love the ocean. Tea? Coffee? Glass of orange juice? Milk?"

"No, thank you."

"I don't have any of that incredible green stuff."

Martha McAllister had laughed. "I'm nervous," she said.

"Thank you for coming," Hunt had said.

"I live in Winchester," she had said.

"That's a drive!"

"It is. It took me a while. I had to get the children off to school. And then, when I got here, it took a little while to find your street."

"It's a little one—isn't it?" Hunt had smiled.

"It is. . . This is nice."

"This?"

"Yes."

"Well—there's good light, and it's near the ocean. You can't have everything."

"Sometimes you have very little," Martha McAllister said.

"Well, let's. . ." Hunt had started to prepare a canvas, get paints out. "If you. . . if you feel self-conscious, why don't you undress behind that screen. I thought, maybe if you sit in that wing chair. By the window. With the light coming in, you know, through those Sandwich glass bot-

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tles—it's kind of nice, amber—that would be a nice composition."

Another leap. Another impulse, total act of stupidity, larger than his eggplant or his avocado. Just undress, he had said to the stranger: Just undress and sit over there in that chair by the window. At the distant edge of the bay, Hunt could see the shelters of ice fishermen.

And she had done it! Her eyes had gone white, and then yellow and then profoundly blue, but she had moved, as Hunt had suggested, off behind the screen and had come out in his bathrobe, which she had found there, looking so cute, he had thought, so dwarfed and shy.

"Just in that chair," he had said.

And she had moved to the chair, paused, dropped the bathrobe and sat.

"Could you angle slightly," Hunt had said, "to your left? Just a bit."

And she had done it.

"What about something. . . something to read?" he had asked. "It's really, well, forgive the pun but a pain in the ass, to sit like that for a couple of hours without doing anything. Do you like to read? Do you like poetry? I've got a lot of books of poetry. Or if you've got some letters that you need to write—I've got something that's sort of like stationery."

"Poetry." She had said only the single word. Then, when he'd handed her a Modern British and American anthology, she'd said: "You know, I haven't read poetry since I was in college." And she'd smiled, smiled as openly as he had seen her smile and added: "My husband's a surgeon."

"Well, I respect science," Hunt had said and gone back to the last preparations of his canvas.

So Hunt, fresh and unpracticed yet in his stupidity with women, had painted and Martha McAllister had read, and they had chatted.

"Do you really *not* do this with people a lot?" Martha asked.

"First time," Hunt said.

"Why?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why ever did you *ask* me?"

"You're striking."

And she had started to cry. "Hey. . .," Hunt said. "Hey—I'm. . . Are you hungry? Must be time for lunch." And she had dressed, and Hunt walked her down to a little seafood place on the pier.

"I'm sorry I cried," she said.

"Hey, really, please," Hunt said; "God; don't apologize. People cry. I cry. I've cried half my life."

"You have?"

"I'm trying to stop!" Hunt said in a mock-manly voice, and Martha laughed.

"You're a nice person," she said.

"I'm a klutz!" It was Hunt's turn now to laugh. At himself. "But I'm a good painter. At least I think I've got that somewhere—inside. Give it a shot."

"You look older," she'd said. "Than twenty-four."

"Tribulations!" Hunt had joked, pushing the clown.

Clown! That was the second element of his stupidity: wasn't it?! First: he just leapt in. Second he was the clown. There was a Country-Western song which nearly stopped his heart every time he heard it on the radio: Conway Twitty: "The Clown. . . . 'You love the Circus/But you don't love the Clown.' " *Women loved the arenas of Hunt's life, but they didn't cotton, finally, to his act. He was a clown.*

"My husband, Donald, has a very intense schedule," Martha said, walking back the little hill to Hunt's street and house. "He's the Chief Surgical Resident at Mount Auburn Hospital."

"Bright future," Hunt said, and Martha hadn't said anything.

Instead, they walked another two minutes in silence before she said: "He doesn't see me."

"Terrible schedule?" Hunt asked.

"No; I mean, he doesn't see me," and she wiped a hand at her eyes.

Hunt, this time, had cleared his stupidity and understood. "His loss," he said.

Martha was crying again, walking beside him, but trying not to be seen. Back at Hunt's space, she went behind the screen again, undressed, sat, read poetry; Hunt painted. She seemed distracted.

"I want to say something to you. . . but I'm not sure what it is," Hunt had tried.

"Do you want me to leave?" she'd asked.

"Not in the least."

Mid-afternoon, Martha'd announced that she'd have to go. "I have children who will be home," she said. She had asked to see the painting; Hunt requested that she wait until it was finished. Was that a third area of his stupidity?: Not wanting to explain himself until everything was clearly through? . . .Possible, Confusing.

"Do you mean I have to come back?" Martha asked.

"Only if you want to."

"Would you like me to?"

"Certainly."

"You like having 'older women' in your studio?" She'd asked the question almost bitterly.

"You have a quality," Hunt said. "I think it's quite a stunning. . . quality. I'm trying to paint it. I'd like trying to finish."

"I'm sorry," Martha said. "When?"

"Next Wednesday?"

"Next Wednesday."

She was outside the door. He was in. "This was a crazy thing for me to do," she'd said. "A bit of abandon. But I'm glad I did it."

"Me too."

And they'd smiled at each other, and Hunt had watched her climb into a beige VW, pull away.

The following Wednesday, she arrived at nine with a box of tea. "Do you know this brand?" she'd asked.

"I don't," Hunt said.

"Here. It's for you." And this second week, she stepped out of her clothes without the screen and just assumed her pose by the window in the chair. "Still have that poetry book?" she'd asked.

He'd given it to her. "You seem. . . I don't know what, *peppier*, this week. Is that a word? Do you know what I'm saying?"

"You don't have a phone," she said.

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"I know."

"Yes, of course *you* know. But I spent almost an entire day—looking for your number."

"You didn't find it." He was clowning again.

"How did you guess?!"

And they'd laughed.

Before lunch, Martha McAllister had looked up from a poem she was reading, announced: "I may leave my husband."

"Excuse me," Hunt had said.

"He doesn't see me. He doesn't hear me. I took some books out of the library. Poetry. I hadn't read it, really, since college, and when I was here, last week, and read nearly all day, I went home and thought: God, really, what am I missing? Why have I forgotten this? So I went down—and took some books out. An anthology and one by that wonderful man who's in this one, Theodore Roethke. And I tried to read some of the Roethke poems to my husband, Donald, and all he said was: 'Wake to sleep'? what does that mean? It doesn't even make sense.' I mean, I'm supposed to know all the bloody names of his *clamps*—but he won't listen to a line of poetry!"

Hunt nodded. That was something he did a lot of too: Sunk in his stupidity about women, like the mute bell-buoy in the harbor, he bobbed and nodded.

"Half the people that we know are leaving each other," Martha went on. "More than half, probably. Donald tells me about it, tells me the stories. I think he wants it. 'Did you know that Chuck and Elaine are splitting?' he said to me Sunday night. And then last night, he asked: 'Guess what I heard today about Arthur and Pam.' He wants it. He's expecting it. He's planting the seeds."

More bobbing from Hunt. "Well . . . " he managed.

"Do you have a woman?"

"Woman?"

"Someone that you don't just paint. A woman. A girlfriend—I'm sorry."

And Hunt remembered being very at sea, churned up, self-conscious. "Any candidates?" he'd said. Clowning. Leaping either on or past the obvious. And then it had been Martha McAllister's turn to be off-balance, embarrassed. "I think it's chowder time," Hunt had offered, looking at his watch. "Want to get dressed?"

And they walked again to the pier, lunched. Hunt bought wine. The day was greyer, gustier. They joked. Hunt tried to keep the conversation light. And it had worked until, over the last of the rosé, Martha asked: "What do you envision marriage to be?"

"Whose?"

"Yours—when you have it."

"I don't know," Hunt said and felt discomfort.

Dreamer! That was the third element. Hunt was a dreamer, afraid of being called to announce the claims of his heart. He expected Giving. He expected Sharing. He expected the dimensions of Love that he had Witnessed in his mother. But he was reluctant to insist, reluctant to make such outrageous claims. Except in shifting and absurd ways on himself. God, what an asshole!

"You don't really know what you envision marriage should be?"

"I'm a kid," Hunt had said, leaping, clowning, sidestepping the reluctant and the driven Dreamer, trying to.

"No, you're not," very seriously Martha McAllister said.

"Hell, I was yesterday! Where has my youth gone?!" And Hunt tried to ride out of the situation and moment on the back of a joke. Walking back up the hill, he had quieted. "Sorry I was flippant back there," he said.

"You're vulnerable," Martha McAllister said, and Hunt unlocked his house in silence.

For the hour-plus of that afternoon, Martha hadn't read; rather, she watched Hunt. "I love watching you," she said. "Work. It's a lesson. It's a kind of lesson for me. You shut everything else out. But you open up at the same time. How do you do that?"

Hunt felt self-conscious. *O.K.: And there it was, bottom line: leaping, clowning, terrified dreaming, all spinning down the same drain into the same stupid sink: His Self-Consciousness. Christ!*

"I just work," Hunt said. "I just put my time in and work. I do what I have to."

At two-thirty, Martha slid from her chair, crossed the room and picked her clothes from the back of the screen and stepped into them. "You know, it's curious," she said. "On one level, I feel like we've been having an affair. On another, I absolutely don't. Do you feel that?"

Hunt had looked at the floor, then up. He'd tried to reach. He'd tried to be honest. "There's something in you," he said, "that's really . . . beautiful . . . powerful. And I'm just trying to . . . draw it, have it . . . out, or . . ." He swallowed; "have it be, have it happen in this room: I'm not making sense, I know; I'm not saying it."

Martha McAllister was crying.

"Oh, shit," Hunt said.

"Don't apologize," she said and finished dressing. She hugged him unexpectedly when she left.

On the final Wednesday, she arrived with a poem she'd written.

"Read this!" she said.

Hunt had made her tea, then sat and read the poem. It was simple, unimitative, clear. The day outside was warm and fully spring and even through the clapboard of his little house, Hunt could smell the earth's arrival, mixed, as it always was in this place, with sea. The poem was about recognition: "Sight touches me . . . ," it began. In the poem, an unnamed man and woman saw, each, into the other's heart. Hunt had felt a chill buzz his spine. "It's moving," he said, nodding, after a second reading.

She had seemed so gay. She seemed lifted and of a single spirit, released from weight that morning. But Hunt, strangely, felt a new gravity coming in. "Keep it!" she said; "that's yours. I made a copy!" And she whisked her clothes off, proud of herself, Hunt thought, proud of her being, proud of her spirit and her bones.

"You're wonderful today," he had said.

"I wasn't wonderful last week?"

"Yes. But today especially."

"You've made me wonderful," she said.

And then, suddenly, there it was again: Hunt, Self-Conscious.

"You've made a wicked, singing woman out of me,"

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she'd said. It was sweetly boastful. "I sing my lungs out all the time at home. I have my kids doing it with me. Donald says, 'What's gotten into you?' I think he hates it." And she laughed. She had just thrown her head back and laughed, her hair free; her hair unbound and free, not at all as it was when Hunt had first seen her in Schrafft's. "You have sinister powers!" she said, pointing.

"It's news to me," Hunt said.

And instead of reading that morning, Martha McAllister had unwound her life: "Do you want to know everything there is to know about New Mexico?" she asked him and then just went on—hills, houses, adobe, girlfriends, boyfriends— "Oh: and there was this beautiful, beautiful boy named *Luis*. Luis . . . Ramon . . . Martinez! Exquisite face! Like a woman's! I tried to find him once in New York!" And she asked Hunt about *his* youth.

"Right here!" he said. "You're a witness. It's happening. I'm living it. Take good notes!"

"I mean *youth*."

"Standard stuff. Standard stuff," Hunt said, leaping, clowning, feeling his self-consciousness grow. "Football, class clown, double octet: Life of every boy growing up in the Boston Suburbs!"

"Girls?"

"No; girls were different. Girls were different: no football!" Hunt had tried to laugh, make the joke stick.

"You really have a problem!" she said, laughing but meaning it.

"I'm an artist," Hunt said, edge now in his clowning.

"I mean it! You find beauty in the most buried places. Closed-off places. But then you're scared to death to have what you discover *approach* you."

And Hunt had not answered. He'd just gone on painting. And there'd been a silence.

". . . You're sweet," Martha McAllister finally said. But, again, Hunt had been unable to find an answer.

"Let's have lunch here," she said, when Hunt had indicated time to break.

"I have unequal relationships with women," Hunt said out of the blue; they were unknown words, arriving but unexpected.

Martha McAllister nodded. "Do you not want me to tell you that I've fallen in love with you?" she asked.

"That's right," Hunt said.

"Your eyes are incredible," she said.

"Stop it. Please." And Hunt had walked behind the counter in his tiny ship's kitchen in his studio and enclosed himself.

"Don't you believe that you could be loved?" Martha McAllister asked.

"I have water-packed tunafish or ham spread," Hunt said.

"You've made me believe that *I* could be loved." Her voice, though unyielding, soft.

"I have Schlitz beer and Gallo burgundy."

"Okay . . . okay," she said; "I'll have tunafish and burgundy."

"*In* burgundy?"

"*And* burgundy." She'd been angry.

They'd eaten lunch, at first, in silence. Then Martha asked Hunt about different birds she saw, moving in branches, just beyond the window. He identified them. He knew birds. He knew birds and animals, young and adult males of his species.

Then, after another lull, in their talk about birds and seasons, Martha asked the question: "Should I ask the obvious?"

And Hunt tried not to sound defensive: "If it's obvious—no," he said.

"O.K.," she'd said.

All right: So then what the hell was it that made him feel so divided? Self-conscious? What was the history of those moments which made him feel in retreat from himself? What part of himself was warding off what other part? He was walking now just to move, just to circulate. He was heading toward the middle of the lake. Without guile, with no apparent condition, Martha McAllister had said, essentially, to Hunt: *I would like to be a person for you*. With you. And a terror had come—like a tide made up to angry froth by the wind. *What was the Fear to accept that?*

"You're a model," Hunt had said.

"Excuse me? What?" And she lowered the glass—half-filled at her lips—of burgundy.

"I don't even know, exactly, what I mean. But you're a model," Hunt repeated.

"My name is Martha McAllister," she said.

"I know."

"I've spent eighteen hours naked with you in this room."

"Yes."

"I've shared my poetry. Sung at least one song. Spun my childhood. I asked my husband last night—I asked Donald: 'Why do you talk all the time about other couples' divorces? Do you want one?' And he stared. As if he didn't want to but couldn't help it. And then he came over by me and started crying and hugged and hugged me. 'I thought *you* did.' he said again and again; 'I thought *you* did.' And he said he knew he was a terrible husband—boring, half the time preoccupied. And so he said that he was just trying to tell me that if I needed to leave him, I could go. He was scared. He was scared to love. You're not scared to love. But you seem absolutely terrified that . . ."

"I know what you're going to say," Hunt said.

"Then I won't finish," Martha McAllister said.

"I'll be done in another half hour."

"Fine." And she had reassumed her pose. And he had finished.

He'd turned it to her. "Here!" he said. And she had stared, stared, her eyes wider than any eyes Hunt thought he had ever seen. He knew; he understood in watching that she felt deep connection, deep gratitude, deep pleasure. ". . . It's me," she said.

"I know," Hunt said.

"No: I mean, it's me. It's *me*."

"I know."

And she'd been crying. And Hunt, unable to just watch her, had approached, touched, held. "Hunt—it's *me*," she said. "And I'm beautiful!" And Hunt nodded. And she buried her head into his shoulder. And they stood that way for perhaps five or ten minutes.

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"You'd better get dressed," Hunt had finally said.

"Yes," she said. And she had, sniffling, done that.

And Hunt said: "Here—have a piece of this. This is fresh whole-wheat bread. I forgot I had it."

"Thank you," she said.

And Hunt said, "You're welcome."

When she was ready to leave, Hunt had tried to give her the painting. "No," she'd said.

"It's yours," he said. "It's you."

"It's yours," she said.

"I only painted it," Hunt said. He carried the painting down the steep staircase, trying to give it.

"I'm going home," she said at the door.

"Take this," Hunt said.

She said, "No."

"Why won't you take it?"

"Why do you need to give it?"

"It's a portrait of *you*."

"But maybe it's a *self*-portrait. Maybe you're as much in that portrait as *I*. Maybe it's a self-portrait if you look closely. Have you looked closely? Maybe you should."

The sun, the light just outside Hunt's front screen door had been bounding on that May afternoon. It had been like a joyful animal: alive.

Maybe Hunt was stupid about Women because, in part, he was one.

And Martha McAllister kissed Hunt once lightly on the mouth. Then on his eyelids. Then on his hands. "We penetrate each other's lives," she said to him. "We model, suddenly, for one another." And then she was pushing the screen door open, and the harlequin sun was leaping in, exposing Hunt in a pool of light, suddenly, in the doorframe. "Remember me!" she called through the open window of her Volkswagen.

And Hunt had. And Hunt was. And now he was in the middle of his lake, nose nearly frostbitten, staring down into a black hole, a thin skim yesterday plumbed surely by fishermen. And Leah was by the house on the bank, very anxious, waving her arms, waving her arms, shouting to Hunt to *pleaseGodplease*, see her. □

LEE UPTON

HAPPINESS

In the hot white dome of air
here where the cicadas scream,
simmer and scream,
as if someone has just put them on to boil
we take our time with the poor salesgirl
who has come to our door
with the pictures her brother paints.
A village in clouds,
three people looking at a peach
in a white sky,
a tiny bridge and tinier men
off in the distance.
The title is Happiness she tells us.
She is shy and doesn't expect
anyone to buy anything from her.
In this one
darkness wants to overcome
the awkward shapes on a road,
smudged as if their bodies could
ascend through the firs.
We sink back into the heat
entering our formless world again,
past this ugly tenderness.
Her brother paints
all about escape
as if he feels the world
around him too much, more than
the heat on the fourth floor
that presses on us today
but never leaves him.
The boy is just learning to paint.
And the shy salesgirl
in pink tennis shoes,
her head bowed, wants a glass of water only.
He is sick, her brother, she says.
He spends all day making these.
There's something wrong with him, but
she's not supposed to tell us what.
I take the last scene she shows,
a lion or a yellow bear
I think in snow
and angry at a red bird
above him. If he caught her
he wouldn't let her go.
This animal wants to take
the world in his mouth
and eat it slowly. If he caught her
he would still be angry.
The title of this painting appears,
the painter's sister lets us know,
on the back. It is called Happiness.
She is sorry, she says.
They are all called Happiness.

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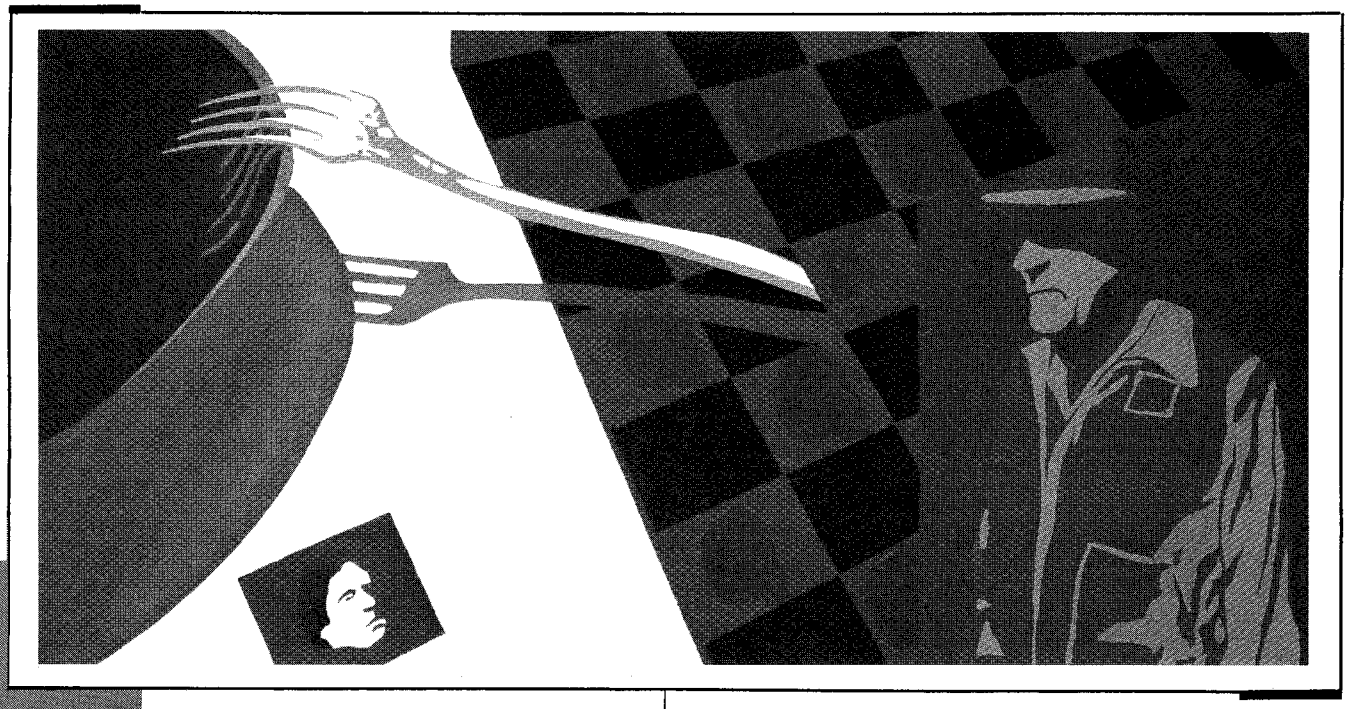
THE MEAT MAN'S DEATH

JOANN KOBIN



WORDS

At the center of her memory was his silence, words half-formed, words lost in cold air.

Language flourishes in temperate climates, Margaret believed, picturing the verdant, sweet land that lay between the Tigris and the Euphrates, and the ancient tablets crowded with cuneiform writing. Her father, a meat man, had spent most of each day in the arctic climate of a refrigerator—hindquarters of beef on hooks in long neat rows, as orderly as an old-fashioned classroom, the temperature a drop above freezing.

Only months after his death did she remember his face—his eyes, the coiled cry. Only months after that did she remember his words. There were only a few.

She was thinking about her father while driving to see her son.

WHAT WAS MISSING

The nurse entered his room with a small box which she carried in two hands in front of her like a gift. In it was her nurse's cap, as crisp and white as clean paper. She pinned it to her head, and placed the empty box on the top shelf of the closet.

The nurse helped her father out of bed and into an armchair in front of a panel of fixed glass. The view behind was of fancy houses with red clay roofs, palm trees, an inlet with a dock, the sea in the distance, some haze over the sea.

He was wearing his own unwrinkled blue pajamas, his thinning wavy hair, perfectly combed. The nurse said, "Mr. Silver, you look very handsome today—but there's one thing that's missing. Do you know what it is?"

Her father shook his head. He didn't know what was missing. He didn't care what was missing.

"Now think hard, Mr. Silver. I want you to tell me what's missing."

Her father shook his head. All he knew was that his perfect body was imperfect.

"Mr. Silver," the nurse said, "you have your lovely blue p.j.'s, and your socks to match. Your slippers, your bathrobe, the blanket tucked so neatly around your lap. Your beautiful shining hair, your rosy complexion—but one thing is missing."

Anguish on her father's face; the stupid boy in class. For the life of him, he didn't know what was missing.

Margaret wished the nurse would stop.

The nurse, not without dignity, was competent. She whipped the bed into shape, watered the gloxinia, rearranged the get-well cards and read the chart. "Good for you, Mr. Silver! Your liquid intake has increased. You're ready for solids." The nurse pulled up a straight-back

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chair close to him and looked him straight in the eye. "But something is missing."

Her father shook his head, and finally the nurse told him what was missing: "Your nice smile is missing, Mr. Silver," she said.

And then her father tried to oblige. That was when Margaret wanted to run. A quick lopsided smile passed over her father's lips. The eyes of an animal brought to bay.

MORNING

The highway, recently completed, cut out of the earth's surface, was a diagonal slash across two states. It originated three miles from the airport, where at 6:30 that morning she had dropped off her daughter who was en route to a summer job at Yellowstone and, three days earlier, her husband who flew off to see his aging parents. The family was a seed pod burst open.

The highway ended thirty miles from the ocean, not far from the college that her son attended and where he was working as a janitor. During the summer the campus hosted a variety of groups—from bird watchers to aviation buffs. He was living in a near-deserted fraternity house.

She drove in the fuzzy blonde sunlight of a summer morning. The canyon walls of the road had the fresh jagged appearance of a new wound, seeping white powder. The ocean waited at the end of the road, a pot of gold, a glass of water—liquid, shining, not like a wound.

LIKE HIS GRANDFATHER

Michael had the sweet bow mouth of his grandfather, also his diffidence, the absence of presumption. A person whom one would choose to live with in close quarters. Like his grandfather, Michael—given the choice between less and more—would choose less. Margaret's heart ached when she pictured Michael choosing less. Choose more, choose more, she urged him, muttering under her breath, her foot pressing on the gas pedal. The speedometer jumped to seventy. Hers was the only god-damned car on the highway.

It was all right for her father to choose less, but not for her son. She wanted abundance for her son. The abundance he had, she remembered now with relief—different from his grandfather—was words. The car slowed to the legal limit. He was reading *War and Peace* when she spoke to him on the telephone last week. He had just finished *Middlemarch*.

IN CHOPS WE TRUST

The crisp hat was returned to the square box with ceremony. A bugler, had he been present at that moment, might have played taps. They were all a little sorry to see the nurse leave. She made them feel safe—her authority, her competence, her starchy optimism—although she had no effect on the look in her father's eyes. He was making a fine recovery, but his body had let him down. Whatever pact he had with the Almighty was broken. Margaret found his resignation intolerable.

The new nurse on duty arranged the bedtable with his dinner—two thick lamb chops, carrots, a baked potato. He removed the glasses, spread the paper napkin over his chest. He glanced at the food, then looked away. How he would have loved those lamb chops a few weeks ago! A meat man, he trusted in porterhouse steak marbleized with slivers of fine white fat, and lean ground beef, and prime ribs.

He nibbled at his food. There was silence where once there would have been appreciation. She waited to hear his judgment on the chops—their tenderness, their juiciness—or an estimate of their cost, but nothing was forthcoming. She waited, hoping for the old spark. The chops were thick. They looked good. It was obvious that the plate of food sickened him. The nurse encouraged him and he tried to eat but couldn't—a failure to himself, Margaret surmised, remembering old struggles over cleaning the plate.

THE LOSS OF MUSIC

She found Michael's fraternity house, a shabby old mansion on a side street near the college. The front steps were littered with beer cans and inside—big empty rooms in varying states of decay: the debris of drinking and smoking. Dirty walls with holes. The fraternity, she knew, was co-ed and she searched for evidence of the "civilizing" feminine influence—a circle of chairs, a picture on the wall, draperies. There was none.

Michael was watching for her from his bedroom window on the second floor. He came downstairs, and let himself be hugged, then led her outside. "You see, I warned you. The house is a pigsty." She nodded. "I didn't believe you. Now I do." They sat on the front steps amidst trash. Two golden beer cans glowed in the sunshine. The street was lined with maples. She enjoyed the lacy pattern of the leaves against the sky.

"Get the bad news over with first," Michael said, not making eye contact; "my stereo was ripped off."

"How did that happen?"

"The house is wide open. No one bothers to lock up. I don't think there *are* any locks. Someone just walked in and took it. Whoever it was also took Frank Milzer's ten-speed Fuji."

"Did you report it to the police?"

"Right away." He was proud of his efficiency, and minimized the personal loss. "I really wasn't listening to it that much. I was seriously thinking of selling it." Then a few seconds later—"Insurance will cover it, don't you think?" She thought it would. "I don't think I'll replace it right away."

"But I thought you loved listening to your records." He shrugged, and said, "At least they didn't rip them off."

Sitting on the steps with him, she felt a sadness similar to times when he would make himself a special lunch to take to school—perhaps a chicken sandwich with Russian dressing and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups—and then

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would forget it and leave it on the kitchen counter. Even as she had imagined his disappointment over the forgotten lunch, she had known that her concern was far worse than his.

He said, "I'm not happy in this fraternity. I think I'll drop out."

"This fraternity—or any fraternity?"

"No fraternity," he said. Then he asked her if she wanted to go somewhere for lunch, and she told him that she did, preferably to a place by the ocean.

He stood up, touching the top of her head very quickly. He knew a good place.

VULGARITY

The nurse arrived with the box, removed the hat, put it on. Placed the empty box on the top shelf. She watered the gloxinia, a purple effulgence, the most vulgar of plants.

Margaret kissed her father. "You look well-rested today." Her father tried to smile but not very hard and she felt as she often felt, even when he was well, like she had thrown in her line and caught no fish. She tried again. "Did you have a good night's sleep?" "Good enough," he said. "For a while I had gas."

"That's excellent, Mr. Silver," the nurse said, overhearing them. "That's important that you expel that gas. You're recovering."

Her father made no sign that he heard.

Margaret's step-mother spoke, taking her husband's hand. "Darling, do you want to get up a while and sit by the window?"

Her father gave a little shrug as if to say—if it makes you happy, I will.

The nurse turned to Margaret and whispered, "Sometimes the people who have been the healthiest make the worst patients."

There was truth to that, Margaret thought. She had no memory of her father ever being ill—only an appendectomy years before she was born. He had never referred to that operation but her mother had told of the string of curses he had murmured while coming out of the anesthesia. Everyone had been shocked. Refined Mr. Silver!

"Dad, were you ever sick? With a bad cold or a sore throat or a virus?" She tried to talk with her father, tried to get his mind to focus on the body's natural process of illness and recovery, lapses and rallies. "Dad, did you ever have a twenty-four hour bug? Did you ever throw up?"

"I don't think so," he said. "No." His eyes didn't meet hers. She wondered if they ever had. Whatever those eyes were saying—they had been rehearsing for years.

TWO DAMES

She handed Michael the keys. He adjusted the seat. "It's so good to get behind a wheel," he said. His spirits rose and the conversation turned to his sister whose exuberance he cherished. He opened the window. The air was fresh, not cool. In his love for his sister there was an acknowledgement of his love for her.

He offered her the restaurant on the wharf—umbrellaed picnic tables outdoors—and refused the lobster she offered him. He preferred broiled halibut, no dessert. They ordered a carafe of wine. Only a few tables were occupied. The town was not a haven for tourists.

Within sight of the sea she relaxed. The air had that briny tang she loved—that only the Maine coast had. The farther south one went the less salty the ocean seemed to be.

"Look at those two dames at the table over there," she said, bobbing her head in the direction of a table near the entrance to the restaurant. Women older than herself in tight white pants, gobs of make-up, gold jewelry.

"Two *dames*?" Michael said, and she laughed, correcting herself. "Two women."

"What kind of word is 'dames'?"

"An expression of Grandpa's," she said.

"I can hear him saying it." Her son smiled, and, encouraged, she told him more of his grandfather's expressions—little phrases that she had found herself using lately, without thinking: "a long drink of water"—to describe a tall thin woman; "items"—things to pick up at the store; "full of baloney."

"Did I tell you that I read *Pride and Prejudice*," he asked, "and liked it a lot this time around?"

"No, you didn't mention that. I'm glad. I thought you'd like it if you gave yourself the chance. You were in the middle of *Middlemarch* when I spoke to you on the phone. Did you finish that?"

He nodded. "Great book. Did you read it?"

"Only half," she admitted. "I got stuck."

"Try it again," he said. "I think you'll love it. It's really about how people learn, mature; their moral growth. There must be a careful balance between active thought and passive observation."

"Between what and what?" she said.

CLOSE TO THE PLACE

In the early afternoon the nurse said, "Margaret, it's time for you to take your father for a walk."

The corridor was carpeted and resembled the hallway of a motel, rooms on both sides, the low rumble of TV sets; none of the usual bustle of a hospital. The patients on this floor were on their way to full recovery, almost home. A lab technician walked by with a wire basket of vials and bottles, cotton balls, and tubes.

Her father held her arm, not leaning heavily, but listing towards her, bumping her every fourth step. Smaller than she remembered him, light. She had seen his smooth white calves and ankles and feet when he got out of bed. Veinless. The legs and feet of a young man.

They made their way, walking slowly; he tried not to lean on her at all. He had never needed comforting, had never asked for it. Comfort, unknown currency. But she remembered holding his hand and getting him to skip along the streets with her. He had done that many times.

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Loose change jingled in his pocket. A nickel and a quarter and a few pennies and dimes fell out onto the street and they stopped skipping, and retrieved the coins.

The corridor made a right-angle turn. They passed a window with a view of a stucco apartment building, the sea in the distance; the haze had lifted. Margaret made her father rest. "Look down there," she said, "an avocado tree—loaded." He smiled. "Isn't that a beautiful sight," he said weakly.

Wanting to talk to him, she searched for common ground. He had been a small businessman. Two years ago she had left a partnership to open her own law office. "I love having my own office," she said.

"You're your own boss," he replied, nodding. "No time-clock to punch. No one to answer to."

She had found the right subject, and went on. "I can plan my own time for vacations and it's convenient—much more so than when I worked with Doug and Louise. I'm only twenty minutes from home."

"I always thought that was important," he said. "That's why I didn't agree with your mother when she wanted to move to the suburbs. In the bad weather I wanted to be close to the 'place.' " There was guilt in his voice: the only time he disappointed her mother. It was still on his mind—her mother's unfathomable desire to live in the country, in a house with a garden.

"We had a beautiful apartment," Margaret said.

"That it was," he murmured.

He was tired now, his cheeks slightly pale. He took her arm in a firmer grasp.

IN A LOINCLOTH

She asked the waiter for a steak knife and with it cut a smart incision the length of the lobster tail, and removed the meat in one piece. She drank another glass of wine. "I'm an orphan," she said to her son.

"I know," he replied. "If I forgot, you'd remind me. Every time I see you, you tell me that."

"It's on my mind," she said.

"Enough with that orphan stuff," he said, and then firmly again, "Enough."

She took a sip of wine and stared at the sea. For a few minutes she felt safe.

"Your birthday's in two weeks," she said. "Any chance of your coming home?" He was a July baby, and the last time he had been home for a party was when he was ten, the summer before he discovered Indian camp, near Moosehead Lake in Maine. Camp in Maine, college in Maine. She called him a "Mainiac."

"I don't think so. Too much traveling for two days. Next year when I'm twenty-one."

"How will you celebrate?" she asked.

"I was thinking of going into the woods and fasting."

Enjoying the car and the shifting, he took another route back to the campus, past shipbuilding yards, a neighboring town, a bridge. "That's the Kennebec River," he pointed out. "When I was at Indian camp—the first year I was a junior counselor and Craig was a sophomore at Reardon, like I am now, he told me that the Kennebec starts at Moosehead as a stream and ends up here, a river."

She pictured her son setting forth from the smooth cold mountain lake, a lone figure in a loincloth, a beaded collar at his neck, paddling downstream, the stream broadening and deepening, the current moving ever more swiftly.

"You took that stream," she said softly, more to herself than to him.

AND NOW THE RIVER

She maintained alertness, frequently checking her rear-view mirror. Deftly she passed a blue Toyota. She drove like her father, a trifle too fast, and pondered her son's caution, his renunciation. She was worried—would he get what he wanted?

The windows open, her hair blew in the rush of air. The highway was cut out of rock, a diagonal slash; the ocean was behind her, like a glass of wine the color of sauterne. The family was a seed pod.

Would he get what he wanted? Want and need. Would he get what he needed? Those words, familiar, from a song that Michael used to sing when he was in high school, a song by The Rolling Stones: "You can't always get what you want,/ but if you try sometimes/ you just might find/ you get what you need."

She conjured him up, a baby, Michael: the bow mouth; curly electric hair; that hair, the envy of the nurses. A sweetness, a sensibility. Yes, even intelligence and refinement—yes, in a newborn baby. But he had little interest in the breast and, in despair, she finally gave up trying to nurse him. Even with a bottle it took an hour for him to drink two ounces of milk. By the end of the summer, she took him outside in her arms and held him up under the trees so that he could see the patterns of leaves, the green filigree against the blue sky. His eyes were blue.

He grew, he laughed, learned to speak. He got into mischief. He built tipis in the yard, igloos in the winter. At Indian camp he made a vest and loincloth out of a thin suede leather skin with fine bead work. He received a secret Indian name—a sacred name, a name he couldn't divulge. He carved a wooden spoon which she loved to use because of its texture and balance.

Margaret drove past the old red brick factories of Billerica. Someone on the other side of the road flashed his headlights at her. She slowed down, and a mile or two later passed a State trooper's car hiding in wait. Her heart leaped. Thanks, she nodded to the car on the other side of the road, now long gone.

She accelerated again; breathed; felt released. Her son was who he was. Who he was. A young man in a canoe. Leaving the cold smooth mountain lake, paddling downstream, with his sacred name, a name he couldn't divulge. The stream widened; stretches of white water; times when portage was necessary. The stream turned into a river. A lone figure on the river.

And her father was the river. □

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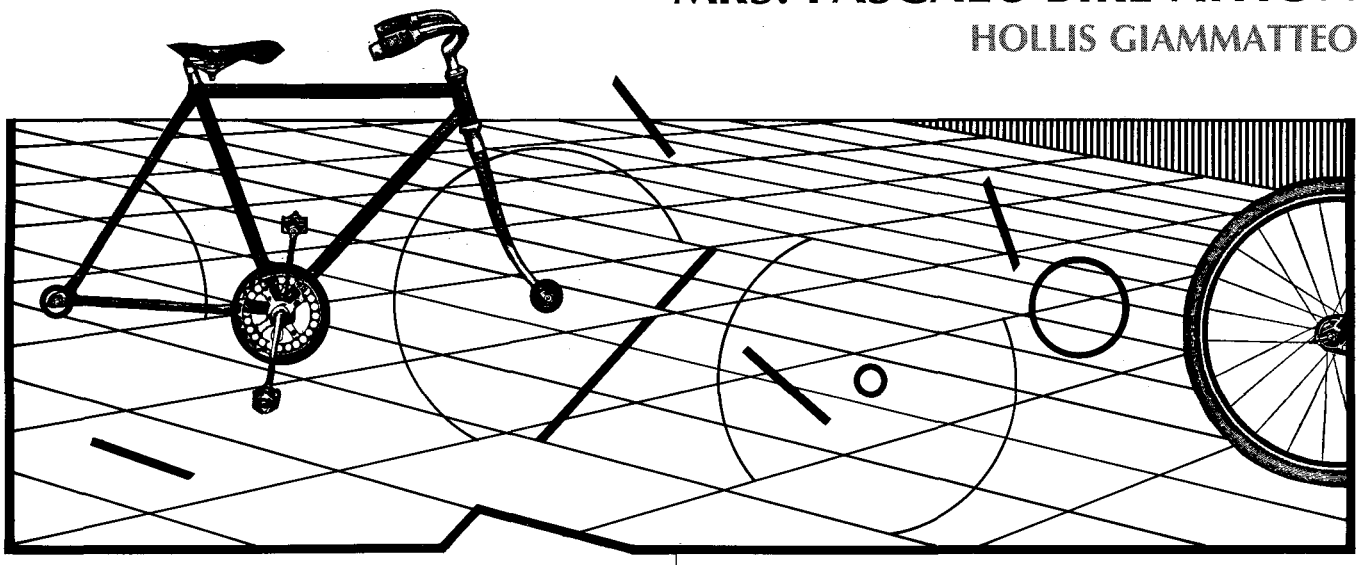
MRS. PASCAL'S BIKE-ATHON

HOLLIS GIAMMATTEO



Mrs. Pascal wore a baseball cap and was arranged under an afghan, on a little strip of yard in front of the azaleas. The azaleas had been out for a month. They flashed among branches like sewn things, organdy in nature. Long ago she had planted them, every color. She kept Monet, Manet, Degas alive this way. Also, they were her indication of warm weather. "I've been around the world three times," she sighed. Azaleas gave her pleasure—coral, white, magenta, all the reds. They quivered in a light breeze that made her tremble. It would be warm now for the azaleas, even though she couldn't get warm.

"Mother, would you like some tea?" said Claire. Concerned always concerned was Claire, wheeling her into the sun, when there was any, fixing her peppermint tea, sticking her head out of the door every hour, who needed a clock with Claire, her daughter's diligence always reminding her that she was a person now in need of afghans, hourly checks, and herbal teas. She thought she'd answered. The not wanting to was distracting; she couldn't remember whether she said, "No thank you, dear," or only thought it. She pretended not to hear. The door tapped. Claire closed it softly.

"Tap, tap," she thought, "Claire will die of making nicey." Claire's one real lapse had been the baseball cap. She'd promised, weeks now, something better. Mrs. Pascal wondered, did she rummage through the same old boxes every week, rattle free of each other the same tiny, pastel hats with miniature bouquets pinned to colored veils?

"Oh Mother, remember when?" Claire loved to play. She saved everything. Empty perfume bottles. Forty year old Easter hats. Abbey's baby quilt and plastic horses.

"What are you hanging on to, anyway?" she would ask her. "Do you play with plastic horses?"

Claire had given her Abbey's baseball cap to sit outside in, and then she quietly forgot. Mrs. Pascal would prefer spittle and scenes to Claire's tablespoons of malice.

"It would do her good," Mrs. Pascal thought, "to say it, just once, that she is tired, even though I feel like a total ass in Abbey's baseball cap." She felt like a fan, deposited too early on the vast green, conspicuous with waiting. She felt she should be sitting there with popcorn and a bright pennant on a skinny stick. She looked out on the quiet street.

A bicycle with a rider in a helmet sped by. Mrs. Pascal was glad she wasn't in a helmet. She felt victimized enough being set out in Claire's color schemes. The biker had passed by every day that she was sunning, and she always stared, trying to determine its sex. The helmet covered most of the biker's hair, although the top was somewhat open, and so clumps stuck up outside of it. The biker usually wore a big jersey and there were no breasts there. Mrs. Pascal was glad about the helmet. You couldn't tell with Claire. She was getting cautious, brittle. She started carrying a stick when she walked her little dog around the neighborhood. She'd stride out with the little excitable dog and the broom stick, swinging like a staff to protect them. She'd encourage him in his efforts to shit or pee. She'd reward him after, as if voiding were a complex skill, acquired after many years of rigors and deprivations.

"Did he achieve the 14 karat b.m.," Mrs. Pascal asked, "or is he still working on the silver? May I come and see?"

Claire would hurry off, as if everyone on the street had heard. From Claire's stiff back, she could sense the furtive glancing. She'd grown cautious and scared. She'd cross the street rather than have to pass a black person walking on the sidewalk toward her. She had four kinds of locks and two alarms hooked up to the front door.

Mrs. Pascal's only fear was on 19th Avenue, where the Cascade Rest Home was. The bone bags were out there sunning also when the weather turned warm. Mrs. Pascal was only two blocks away, but that could have been a different city. Mrs. Pascal's street was small and tree-lined with large wood houses painted freshly every several years, the trendy, tasteful colors—teal blue, oyster, russet. Mrs. Pascal's street was well behaved with leashed dogs, schooled children and liberal bumper stickers on

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imported economy cars. "Support Your Right To Arm Bears." "Save The Whales." Only one block away began the difference. The houses were smaller and tended toward pastel. There she'd passed a bumper sticker saying, "Ask Me About Mary Kay Cosmetics." She'd passed another saying, "Abortion Is A Satanic Rite." That went through her like the image of cow prods held to the marchers in the South. That went through her like grief for all the rage against her people. She had fantasized wheeling herself back some midnight and finding the aqua Rambler and pouring over the sticker a bowl of blood. She had even gone so far as to suggest to Claire that they share a cow with the Hennessey's next door, so they could have fresh, carefully slaughtered meat, and so that she could get her blood. She would get it, too. She would initiate a bumper sticker war. Even though she'd seen more, further down the block, on an old VW and a Studebaker, nearly rusted out. She would like to pour blood over all of them. She imagined the righteous innocence turn to horror and disgust when they walked out their doors in the morning. They would suddenly believe that the forces they were invoking were made horribly incarnate. Where the blood pooled, dripping from the bumpers, she would scatter Mary Kay Cosmetics signs.

Hers was a block of liberal friendliness and sayings. One block away were the keepers of morality and Ramblers; and only two blocks further was Cascade, a squat, brick building painted ochre, facing out on a busy street. No trees were there. Just buildings and macadam. The old got put out. They were caved in, slumped and drooling in their wheelchairs. Mrs. Pascal wondered about love. Would they come alive with it, or would attention remind them of what they'd lost, of friendships, of work, of purpose? Little bundles of wrapped bones they were, drying their flesh in dusty sunlight. Their eyes were always on the sidewalk, as if the dark cool earth would open underneath them. Already they could feel with their eyes the solid earth behind frail shoulders. She hated them. She wanted them to die.

Of course Claire understood she got upset about old age homes. Then Claire would push her toward the museum, away from Cascade. For Claire, a little denial went a long way. Sometimes Mrs. Pascal cried. She'd sit in the kitchen and the tears would just come, surprising her with their hot rush. Then Claire would turn away, and bang pots on the stove, and make tea. Mrs. Pascal wanted to comfort Claire, explaining that they were all so impersonal, so immaterial, these tears; they were all a part, somehow, of getting it together, the package of herself. Before sending it off, that is. But she couldn't tell Claire about becoming a package. Claire would be frightened. Just a few tears put her in a rage of helplessness, when Mrs. Pascal really wanted nothing. Especially not another cup of tea.

She saw Claire take notice from the porch, where she stood with the dog's hot dinner. She was talking to the biker, the one who passed by every day. Claire decided to let them be, because Mrs. Pascal hadn't talked or been herself for weeks, and this was a sign, perhaps, that she was feeling better. But she had to make sure.

"Are you all right, Mother?" she called, concern making her voice sharp, and removing the biker from the realm of safe and compatible humanity.

"This is a biker, Claire, not a terrorist," Mrs. Pascal said. "Come and say hello."

"What a very pretty day for a ride you have," Claire said. "Goodbye. Mr. Keats is crying for din-din."

"That's my daughter, Claire," said Mrs. Pascal. "We both live here. The last place I lived was Florence. Florence, Italy."

"I know Florence," the biker said and took the helmet off.

"Ah, you are a girl," Mrs. Pascal noted. "I won. Claire thought you were a boy. But I saw breasts. I am very good at spotting breasts."

"What did you do when you lived in Italy?" the biker said.

"I hid my breasts," said Mrs. Pascal. "You're standing in my sun."

"I just thought I'd stop," the biker said. She straddled her bike and looked down, smiling. "I pass you every day."

"What are you smiling at?" Mrs. Pascal said, looking up and squinting. Now the sun was in her eyes. People brought problems. Either they were never there offsetting loneliness or they were, but bringing their height, their mobility, and their need to talk. What would happen if she asked to hold the biker's hand? That was really what she wanted. Contact without banal and unfleshed stand-ins for it.

"Your hat," the biker said. "It's very sporting."

"Don't patronize me, young woman," Mrs. Pascal said.

"I'm sorry," said the biker. It showed on her features, a wince for having presumed, for having imposed. She tightened up and gripped the bike as if to go.

"Have a cookie," Mrs. Pascal said.

"Thanks. My name is Angel," the biker said.

"Did I ask for that? All I said was 'Have a cookie'," Mrs. Pascal said.

"Do they have sugar in them, do you know?" asked Angel.

"How can you have a cookie without sugar?" Mrs. Pascal said. "If you don't put in the sugar, it's a cracker. I didn't offer you a cracker. Have a cookie."

"No thanks," Angel said.

"I suppose you have a good reason for that," Mrs. Pascal said.

"I do," said Angel. "What makes you think that?"

"You're obviously not normal," Mrs. Pascal said, "a grown up woman riding by me every day at 2. A normal grown up woman would be working, or waiting for her children, or making din-din for Mr. Keats. A normal grown up woman would never ask if there is sugar in a cookie. So either you're nuts, or you have some good reasons why not."

Angel leaned across the handlebars. "You remind me of Jane Marple in Agatha Christie," she said. "Let's go solve a murder."

"There are a lot to solve up on 19th Avenue," Mrs.

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Pascal said. "I'm going to eat the cookies. Shriek or something if you change your mind."

"What murders?" Angel said.

"There's an old age home up the street," Mrs. Pascal said.

"Of course," said Angel, sighing. "I pass it every day. I never see anyone smiling."

"Now why the hell would anyone there be smiling? Or do you pitch a tent and entertain?" Mrs. Pascal said, wrinkling up a corner of the afghan.

"No, I only meant that I smile when I pass. I don't know what else to do," Angel said, in agony to change the subject.

"I smile when I pass, too. Like Queen Elizabeth honoring the multitude. At the end of the block we all throw confetti."

Angel burst out laughing. "What a great image," she said. "What's your name?"

"I'm Mrs. Pascal. You may call me Irma in a week. And you haven't explained whether you're abnormal," Mrs. Pascal said.

"Well, the sugar thing is how I'm in control," Angel said. "It's me being political. I think that we're a country of sugar freaks, and that's making us sick and keeping us violent. So, I'm saying 'no' to what I think of as a syndrome."

"Rot," said Mrs. Pascal. "You're afraid of getting fat."

Angel blushed. "That too," she said. "I'm a sugar freak. Beat. Out of control." She sat on the grass. They were comfortable and quiet. "Would you pledge me?" she said.

"What's that, pledge?" Mrs. Pascal said. "What does it mean, pledge you?"

"Well, you asked before why I'm on my bike when normal people are having jobs and babies. I'm getting in shape. I'll be leading a bike-athon down to San Francisco."

"A bike-athon," Mrs. Pascal said. "With elephants and sequined ladies?"

"No, no," said Angel. "A bike-athon is when people ride long distances for political issues."

"A bike-athon is not *when*," Mrs. Pascal said. "What grammar."

"Thank you," said Angel. "That does me a world of good."

"Oh, start small. Start with a neighborhood," Mrs. Pascal said.

"A neighborhood of good?" said Angel.

"It's a start," Mrs. Pascal said. "Remember, one block up and two blocks over. So you're going on a long ride to protest cookies?"

"No, no. Nuclear energy," Angel said.

"You're a treat," Mrs. Pascal said. "You're the one out of ten who can pronounce it. 'Nukier', they all say. Which sounds like a combination of toffee and illicit sex."

"What it is," said Angel.

Mrs. Pascal cut her off. "You only want my money," she crossed her arms and looked away. Claire poked her head out from between the doors. She wondered if it was time to send the biker away.

"Are you all right, Mother?" she called.

"Oh bejeesies," Mrs. Pascal said. "You want my money and she wants my happiness. I don't know which is worse."

Angel smiled and waved at Claire. "We're talking politics," she said. That explained it, then, her mother's crossed arms and terrible gaze. But suddenly she flashed a smile at Claire and waved and asked for Mr. Keats. She was having fun, apparently.

"I want you to meet the demise of upper middle class, middle aged womanhood," she said.

Claire came out talking to a small tan dog. He rolled back his warm brown eyes and looked for a second, disconcertingly, like Greta Garbo. "Go to Mother, darling," Claire said, arranging his silky paws tidily on Mrs. Pascal's knees.

"This," said Mrs. Pascal, "is Mr. Keats. And this is Claire. And this is Angel. Hurrah. Another round."

Angel decided it was time to leave. "Well, I'm off," she said. "I'll stop by tomorrow."

"I'll have all my fortune ready," Mrs. Pascal said. "By then, maybe, you will have noticed my beautiful azaleas."

The next day when Angel stopped, Mrs. Pascal asked her, "So what's a bike-athon?"

"Here's a present for you," Angel said. She leaned her bike against a tree and came toward her.

"It must be a special cookie made with salt and political science," Mrs. Pascal said taking the small, flat package from her. "Thank you very much." She opened it. It was a pin. "Question Authority," it said.

"This should be me," she laughed. "People should come and question me. Information on wheels." Stiffly she pinned it on the baseball cap. "I know what it means," she said. "You young people are right and wrong. Both. A lot of hard work is behind your option to say 'no'. You could have some gratitude."

"I have guilt instead," said Angel.

"Is that your bike-athon, guilt?" she said. "Thank you for the present. And the pun."

"I'm sorry," Angel said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"I should be in authority. Instead I'm two blocks down from an old age home." Her hands were lying curled on her lap, palms up. They looked like frail bent creatures held in another larger pair of hands, not visible. "I've been around the world three times," Mrs. Pascal said. "I have lived in Paris. I see a movie once a week. Damn it, I am informed."

"Informed of what?" said Angel. She stood there at a loss, not knowing, suddenly, whether to humor Mrs. Pascal or to agree. She looked like a player looking for a game. It was that outfit, of course, and the helmet; also the confusion. Mrs. Pascal was always this easily reminded of how little it took to discredit the observations of those over 65. Light and shadow made patterns on the lawn. The sky was gray and the shadows were surprising. They looked painted on, gray on gray, with scalloped edges.

"Informed. Just that," Mrs. Pascal said. "No, not the

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GARY MARGOLIS

WAITING AT THE OFFICE OF MAGRITTE

Drawing in the smoke, looking at his painting
of a pipe, I stare and start to blanken,
as if a watch were being swung before my eyes,

or someone sat behind me listening to my dream.
The letters underneath say *This is not a pipe*
and mean, without hope, what they say,

although their aromatic fumes can fill a room
after the smoker leaves, the small fire
in his bowl extinguished.

When I look away beyond the frame, the pipe,
hanging and unhung, floats on the wall
with his diplomas. A breeze gestures

in the smoke, sifting through the screens,
lifting the worried papers on his nurse's desk.
They flutter and land. Dozing, I dream

the great tobacco leaves cure inside
their sheds. Outside, the young plants cool
under the field veils, staged to keep the crop

from burning, before it is cut and hung to dry
in the perfect room of its aging. Below,
in the dirt cellar, a printing press stamps out

the Surgeon General's warning,
Can be . . . Can be . . . and I barely hear
the three syllables of my name, as I am called

into his clinic. Breathing out, I lose
the little death each breath holds.
Now my smoke is an S, now the body of a violin.

CIA. *Newsweek* informed. Keeping abreast. Participating."

"Then it's time to tell you about the bike-athon," said Angel.

"You already have, more or less," Mrs. Pascal said.

"Yes, but if you're going to give me your fortune, you'll want to know more," said Angel.

"What I want to know," said Mrs. Pascal, "is, who will march for me?"

"At least, being involved is something," Angel said.

"Bull," said Mrs. Pascal.

"It is," said Angel, "because I talk to people. That's part of it. Every night I give my spiel about nuclear energy, and end up by saying something about the people who pledged me. It becomes a sort of network. It brings together people who share a cause."

"You mean you lecture?" Mrs. Pascal said. "So where does biking fit in?"

"I bike to each engagement. That can be from between 50 to 100 miles," said Angel.

"All the way to San Francisco," Mrs. Pascal said. "I was an artist for 20 years in Mendocino. I painted every summer. That's a famous artists' colony, you know. I could never paint worth a damn."

"Why did you go there?" asked Angel.

"There was a group of us," she said. "We loved the coast. We loved the smell of turpentine. We none of us could do it worth a damn."

"Let's go to the movies," Angel said. "I'd love to take you."

"My dear, that's kind. But please don't trouble." She nodded solemnly, as if refusing the last delicious cigaret before the blindfold. She looked very old. "You don't really think that riding a bicycle to San Francisco is going to make it go away, all the madness?" She reached out her hands to Angel.

"You do believe in it, don't you?" Angel said, taking Mrs. Pascal's hands.

"I believe in being pushed and prodded into always caring for what's terrible and what's new. But if I'm going to keep my lights on, you bet I need someone to warm my room with me," Mrs. Pascal said, the young woman's hands pressed between hers.

The dog next door was barking. Mrs. Pascal woke up and saw the biker passing. That meant it must be 3.

"Would you like some tea now, Mother?" Claire came toward her with a tray. "You had a little nap," she said. "How nice."

"Go away," Mrs. Pascal said. "I don't want tea. I don't wany any cookies."

"Mother, what's wrong? What is it?" Claire, for whom quiet regularity signified life's bloom, was put lately and constantly on edge by Mrs. Pascal's fits and starts of passion.

"Stop it, Claire," she said. "Nothing special's wrong and everything's the matter. Don't be a fool. I'm only sick of tea. Let me be sick of it in private."

"Let's wipe the sleep away," said Claire, pushing a napkin into the corners of her mother's mouth. Mrs. Pascal felt like a floor wax advertisement.

The air smelled like mushrooms. It was going to rain. The shadows lay on the lawn as if pressed down on it. Claire would come out again in kindness, having pushed the insults and the tantrums into a dark little room of her brain, where they would all get processed. "Emotional cream cheese," Mrs. Pascal thought it. And then they would walk. Claire would wheel her mother. Past the azaleas, electric now in the gray blue, stormy light. Past the Hennesseys'. Up two blocks and then one over. □

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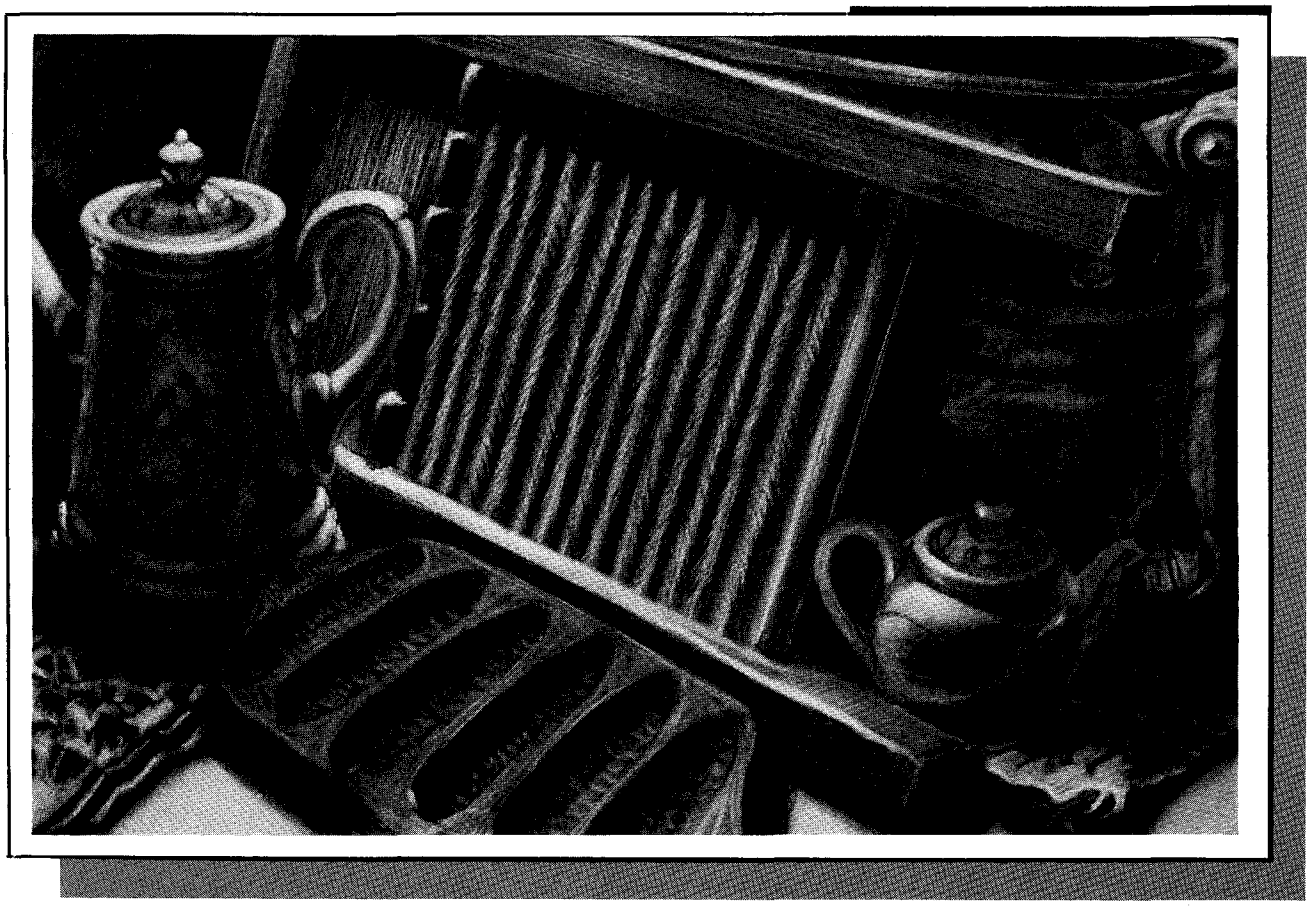
THE LOVED ONE

ADRIENNE WOLFERT



The State child lay hidden in the hayfield watching the social worker get out of her car. Through the thin stalks, she could see the farmyard dappled with mud and sparse grass. The social worker carefully skirted the pans of water, the burlap bag Pa used to wipe his shoes and the clothesline that was Zara's jump-rope.

Some of the scattered leghorns returned to sip from a chipped basin. They lifted their white-feathered throats gracefully as if to gargle. Zara saw the spare figure of her foster mother coming to greet Miss George, even saw Ma looking over the field. When she heard her name, she pressed her head so hard against the earth, she thought she could hear it churning.

I ain't gonna leave here, she thought, and then corrected her thought, I *am not* gonna leave.

A small camouflaged animal, she merged with the New England fields. Her hair was the color of hay, her eyes gray as rock. Her skin had the gray cast of anemia. Her body was knobby and thin.

It was not that this home was so much better than any of the others she had been placed in, nor the foster parents that much kinder. But the Barons' children were grown and departed, Pa Baron was busy with his chores and Ma was not talkative. Also, Zara was the only state child they kept. It was this privacy she cherished.

They leave me alone.

She rolled on her back.

And when she was alone, she could dream and make up stories. She made forms of the clouds—one looked just like a puppy. Someday Pa Baron might get her a puppy. When she opened her eyes wide, held her head to one side and pushed out her lower lip, he would grow soft and gentle with her. He would not even scold her for upsetting the milk or stepping on his pipe.

She smiled thinking of Pa Baron. He wouldn't let them take her away, she was sure he wouldn't. But she was afraid anyway and as always when she was afraid, she shivered.

The cloud had changed shape, become a woman. It is only till Mama comes for me. She hugged herself. She had the urge to wet. It was the urge that came over her at night in the strange homes and made her undesirable to foster mothers, the despair of social workers. They had taken her away when she was too little to remember and

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she had had to create her own memories from pictures of beautiful mothers she saw on calendars and billboards on the highway. She concentrated real hard, squinting her eyes, and she knew what Mama looked like—soft arms, hair sweet-smelling and gold as the tassels of alfalfa, swinging—Zara reached out to grasp it.

And then something alien would intrude, a baby's voice, Maa-maaa—! growing to a siren of sound. Mama was being swallowed by a great blackness, the white arms held out, the swaying hair pulled out of her grasp. When the terrible blackness intruded on her dream, Zara panted for breath, ran, ran, her ears pounding. If it came at night, she wet.

Cut by scythe because there was no money for fancy machines, the hay lay in pale mounds brimming auras of dust. It would be muddied by the men's boots, in the barn, fouled by the animals. She wept for the hay. The dry grass scratched her cheeks and she wept on her arm. Her nose ran and she wiped it on the sleeve of her blouse. She wept until she was spent and then felt better, as though she had accomplished something very important.

She must plan now what she would do when she went back to the house. Ma Baron would be mad at her for running away when she knew the social worker was coming.

In the foster homes she had lived in, there had always been other children. Dumb ones and mean ones and frightened ones. And there was always squabbling and tattling and competition for the foster parents' approval. The bigger girls had to help keep the house clean. The bigger boys worked on the farm or around the yards. Zara was usually the smallest and was kept close to the house. The foster mothers sometimes smelled from perspiration or bad breath and the foster fathers often drank too much and they were both under strain when the social worker hadn't been there for a couple of weeks. Once Zara had been in a city home and the social worker (not Miss George) came unexpectedly and found her sitting in a sodden, stinking crib.

"She's four years old and she's been wetting herself," the foster mother complained. "I have enough work to do without cleaning up after a big child all the time. I told her if she wet last night, she'd sit in it all day."

That very day, Zara was transferred to another home. But she had found her weapon.

In the beginning, she used it to test the woman. The tight lips, the line between the brows, the wrinkled nose, then the complaining, the threats and finally the slap. One had rubbed her nose in the mattress. But nothing, not even a beating, stopped her. She knew she did not have to fear them or the other children who, for all their teasing, envied her that she did not have to stay in a home she didn't like. When Miss George was assigned to Zara's case, she took the child to a doctor. All liquids were removed from her diet. Her skin grew dry and flaky but the habit continued. Miss George would not admit defeat. She was a prim aseptic person who held Zara's hand gingerly, expecting any moment she might soil herself. When she took Zara in the State car, she made sure that Zara urinated before and after every stop. During their trips, she would ask her if she wanted to go to the bathroom whenever they passed a gas station. Zara said, "No'm," very respectfully, holding her bladder tight as she held her breath.

Sometimes she didn't even have the urge at night, but she did it anyway. All day she was docile and obedient; she stood unobtrusively in a corner sucking her thumb and watching the other children. If there was an infant, she took care of it; the foster mothers found they could trust her to keep the baby away from the stove and the stairway. She did not inspire affection for she gave none. Her large eyes seemed to absorb quietly every sound and event about her, but she gave no sign of noticing them. It was the extra laundry and the suppressed resentment of its inevitability that finally defeated them.

The Barons had been the social worker's last resort. Mrs. Baron was going through the menopause and was subject to fits of depression. Mr. Baron thought a little girl in the house might brighten her up. When Zara came into the cheerful white kitchen with its polished black stove, she said right away that she had to go. The social worker ushered her out to the outhouse, which was heavy with antiseptic and not at all nauseating as the others had been. Mrs. Baron looked very serious when Zara returned. She gave Zara four white plates and asked her if she would like to set the table for supper.

Mrs. Baron was not at all the maternal type in appearance. She was rather austere, a tall, bony woman with gold-rimmed glasses and pale lips. But Mr. Baron was round and big and comfortable. His cheeks were red as apples, his skin ruddy from the outdoors, his hair flaming like the sunset and his big, coarse hands covered with short, red hairs. He was very flamboyant in the white kitchen. As red as Mr. Baron was, as pale as Mrs. Baron was, the hired man was dark. His skin was nut brown, his eyes, hair, hands, clothes, look, were dark brown. They all ate without speaking to each other and Zara sat, unable to touch her food, her head lowered, but her eyes studying them carefully. She was not sure yet that she wanted to stay.

After supper, Mrs. Baron said she was going to show Zara her room. They went upstairs in the old farmhouse. There was the musty smell of old wood and yellow soap. Zara caught a glimpse of a room with roses on the wall. A commode stood before the window with a blue flowered basin and pitcher, there were pictures of animals on the walls, and a shelf of books. She stood longingly by the door looking in, but Mrs. Baron had opened another door. This room was smaller and had a dull floral paper. It contained an iron bed and a nightstand with a plain pitcher. There was a brown oilcloth on the floor.

Mrs. Baron had carried up her bag of clothes, the rather gray underwear and the faded dresses. "My," she said as Zara undressed painfully, "You are a thin little one, aren't you. Tomorrow I will give you a nice bath and wash your hair."

Zara crept into the bed. Under the flannel sheet, she felt the smooth coldness of the rubber sheet. Mrs. Baron covered her with a quilt, tucked it in tightly and neatly all

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around and said goodnight. She did not close Zara's door, but Zara heard her closing the door to the other room. She listened to Mrs. Baron's steps going down the stairs rather heavily although she was not a heavy woman. A cold feeling of loneliness came over her. She relaxed her bladder. The warmth of the urine released, fled through the bedclothes, warm and wet and comfortable. She slept.

But after a few days she decided she would like to stay here for the summer anyway. Mrs. Baron did not scold her for wetting the bed. In fact, she said nothing at all about it, just told Zara to bring the sheet down and leave the windows open. The morning sunlight flooded the kitchen; the water for the wash tub bubbled on the stove. Mr. Baron was eating breakfast, just as ruddy and pleasant as the evening before, and Mrs. Baron threw the sheet into the wash tub without wrinkling her nose. Zara had dressed herself in one of the cotton dresses and stood forlornly by the table. Mrs. Baron took the poker, picked up the stove lid and threw a piece of wood firmly into the depths of the stove.

Mr. Baron motioned towards an empty chair. "Sit down, Zara," he said. The child obeyed. After a while he said her name again, "Zara . . . what a pretty name."

"Most think it's crazy," Zara said and put her hand to her mouth. She hadn't sounded very gracious. But Mr. Baron didn't seem to notice. She hadn't meant it to sound that way—she was pleased at what he had said.

"Pretty is as pretty does," said Mrs. Baron, setting a plate of oatmeal before her. There was real butter and cream on the oatmeal. Usually the foster homes couldn't afford real butter and cream. Zara tasted it carefully. The oatmeal was not lumpy but smooth as the cream on it. Mr. Baron watched her thoughtfully. "The child's starved," he said. He glanced at his wife. Her face seemed more pinched than ever.

"How about coming out to the barn with me, Zara," said Mr. Baron. "We have new kittens out there. And pretty soon, we're going to have a baby calf."

Zara thought carefully. It was all right if the men were nice to you, but it was the women who really counted. "Maybe Mrs. Baron wants me to help her here," she offered cautiously.

The two older people looked at each other. There was a moment of silence. Zara could sense that the silence was important. The importance of the silence was in Mr. Baron's anxious eyes—they were red-brown in color, she saw—lined from squinting against the sun, and in the faintest of flushes on Mrs. Baron's cheeks. "There's an old pair of dungarees in the back hall closet," Mrs. Baron finally said. "Maybe they'd fit her."

She did not mean to wet herself the second night. It just happened. After the hard day of play out in the barn, after the warm bath in the basin, after the way Ma Baron clucked her tongue and counted Zara's ribs, and washed and dried her hair, and tucked her in bed and said she must call her "Ma Baron," Zara had fallen straight asleep. Then she'd had a funny dream, that she was swimming in the basin of warm water and it was covering her all up to her neck with soft wetness. When she awoke, she was really wet. She had not wanted to wet and she had done it anyway. It was frightening. She had never wet before when she didn't want to.

It seemed to Zara that Ma Baron would be very angry with her. And the more she worried about it, now that she had decided she wanted to stay here, the worse it got. She would try to keep herself awake, she would come down after she had been put to bed, and ask to go out to the outhouse, and finally Ma Baron showed her the chamber pot in the wash stand. But it was no use. As soon as she fell asleep, she would dream some funny scary dream, or even no dream at all, but the coldness would come over her and the warmth needing to be released and she would awaken in fright. They would come and take her away from here too. There was no use lying to herself. Ma Baron was getting annoyed with all the extra laundry.

Zara tried to make it up to them in other ways. She awoke early before it was even light, and dressed in the slightly large dungarees and ran downstairs. Ma Baron would just be ready to start Pa's breakfast. "I'll get the kindling for you," Zara cried breathlessly, picking up the basket. Mrs. Baron opened her mouth to object and then said, "All right, but put your sweater on."

Zara would step out into the dimming night. Over the well, the last star might still be shining especially for her. Before she went to the woodpile she would go over to the well and stare up at the luminous sky. The air was sharp and clear in the early morning like the day was a little baby with new breath. And the sky was like a little baby's eyes, shining and clear, and strangely innocent, almost liquid in its transparency. Star light, star bright, last star I see tonight . . . She made the same wish over and over again, not daring to whisper the wish aloud for fear of breaking the spell. Her mind and body knew the wish and felt the power of it. Stop me wetting, star, stop me wetting. God, don't let them send me away. Maybe it wouldn't work—the wish was supposed to be said on the first star—or maybe the star knew she was always in bed before the first star and waited especially for her. Because after she had gathered up the wood and returned to the house, the star was gone, the luminosity was gone. Day had begun in a gray, damp mist.

She brought in the kindling and followed Pa Baron to the barn. The cows were waking for the milking; their voices, soft and gentle, urged the men to hurry. The barn was warm with the warmth of the animals. Their brown eyes glowed, the pink tongues sloshed in and out of their mouths. Pa Baron and the hired man pulled up their stools, butted the cow's sides gently with their heads and the steady slish-slosh of the milk was a nice warm sound. Pa Baron said when Zara's hands got a little bigger he would teach her to milk, but she was still afraid of the cows and stood in the doorway of the barn watching them cautiously. The cats would mew waiting for their breakfast and the hired man might squirt a stream of milk right into their eager pink mouths to make Zara gasp and squeal. She would almost forget that today might be the day Mrs. Baron would be angry to find the bed soiled and send her away.

Every once in a while, there would be a night that she didn't soil and then she would hope against hope. Ma

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Baron never said anything about that either, and Zara couldn't help but feel that maybe Ma Baron didn't care one way or the other. But she felt a swelling in her breast to say, "My sheet don't need washing today," even though she tried to keep the feeling out of her voice. Sometimes when it wasn't too bad, she would lie about it. Then she would feel worse, because she knew how Ma Baron must feel about lying. But she had seen plenty of grown-ups lie for all their talk to the foster children. The foster mothers lied to the social worker about the price of the children's shoes, and the visit to the dentist, and the cost of their food, and the allowance they were supposed to give them, and how bad the children were, and how good their husbands were, and how often they washed their clothes, and how much they scrubbed their floors. And they lied about bathing the children, and giving them affection, and talking to them about God, and going to church. And they lied to their husbands too, some of them . . . and one of them had even lied to the minister. She had heard it with her own ears. The jagged, discordant sounds of their lying returned to her ears with her own lie. And it bothered the other sounds that were new and rhythmic and soothing in her three months with the Barons. The sound of the milk falling in the pail, and the news and market reports Pa listened to on the radio every morning at six o'clock, and the chop, chop of the hired man making the kindling wood, and the lowings of the cows wanting to be milked and the bubbling of the oatmeal on the stove, and the perking of the coffee and the wind in the hayfield, and the purr of the kittens under her hands, their tiny, fragile bodies all soft and vibrating, and the calling of the birds in the early morning before sunrise and the sound of her own whisper, "Star light, star bright. . ."

When she'd come back from the barn this morning, she had known right away that Ma Baron had found out the lie. She had heard the sound of the scrub board before she'd even opened the door. How many times she'd wished she didn't hear so well or see so well or feel so well what went on in grown-ups' minds. Her senses seemed to be straining always so that her body was never at rest, so that even in her most tranquil moments the canals of her ears strained, the muscles of her eyes strained, her very skin pricked with feeling as though she were turned on against her will, seeking, reaching out, grasping, transmitting sounds and sights and smells and little nuances of movement without conscious effort. And so she had heard, right through the screen door and the bubbling water and the hollow rub of the washboard, the slightest of sighs from Mrs. Baron's pale lips.

It had frightened her, the sigh. She had heard sighs before from foster mothers, sighs of anger, of hatred, of self-righteousness, of fatigue. But this sigh was one she had only heard when the wind went through the trees, a sound without voice but with all the intensity of a moan. A sigh of sorrow in her, Zara, a big girl who still wet the bed. They had told her that she would not be accepted for school in the autumn if she didn't stop, that no foster parent would want her and she'd have to go to an orphanage. None of these threats frightened her as much as the sigh. She had turned and run away from the house and hidden in the hayfield. Not an hour later, just as she suspected, the black car lettered in gold letters: *State of Connecticut, Welfare Department,* pulled into the yard.

"I won't leave here, I won't."

She thought of the well behind the house. The only time Ma Baron raised her voice to her was when she went too close to the well. The hired man had promised to cement the wobbly bricks when he had time, but the summer months were short and laborious and the bricks were still loose. Every morning she stood near the well and made her wish. Once she had risked peering into its depths and the water had reflected her face, wavering and pale. Her face lay under the film of water staring back up at her, the eyes wide and calm. The star too was reflected and the sky moved liquid over her face and the star.

At last the social worker emerged from the house with Ma. She retraced her path around the debris. Ma nodded goodbye and went back into the house. The car door closed, the motor woke and spat gusts of exhaust. When it was gone, Zara waited until the shadow of the house deepened and the well was penciled on the ground.

"If they try to make me, I'll jump in the well."

She saw herself falling into the well, clutching at the stone sides, into the cold slippery water. She tried to think of what it would be like, how they would yell and holler and throw down ropes to pull her out and how Ma and Pa Baron would be so glad she was saved that they would hug her and kiss her and never let her go.

Ma Baron was setting the table herself when Zara came into the kitchen. A wonderful odor rose from the big pot on the stove. Her stomach was a pit so empty it hurt. Bits of hay stuck to her hair and clothing. She stood near the doorway waiting for the woman to speak first. If Ma Baron said anything about sending her away, she would run back into the yard. I'm gonna jump in the well! she would yell. But the woman said in a firm voice, "Supper's ready." Her tone brooked no argument. Zara pulled a chair up to the sink and kneeled on it to pump water into the basin. The water was cold and clear and had the iron odor of well water. Her reflection stared back at her from Pa Baron's shaving mirror.

Suddenly she plunged her face into the basin. It was icy cold, her cheeks grew numb. She held her breath. Her chest felt as though it would burst, her ears sang, the water burned into her breathing passage. She lifted her face, coughing. The coughing shook her thin frame. She saw her face in the mirror again, red and steaked, eyes and nose running. She did not look like a little girl that anyone would want to keep.

"Here, here," Ma Baron said, "You don't have to drown yourself." She took a soapy clean rag, lifted up Zara's hair and scrubbed her neck. Zara gave herself up to the firm knowing hand, her skin lost its feeling. The smell of the soap was pleasant.

"A big girl like you has got to learn to wash her face," said Ma.

A drop of water in Zara's throat stung painfully. It wouldn't be much fun to drown, she thought. □

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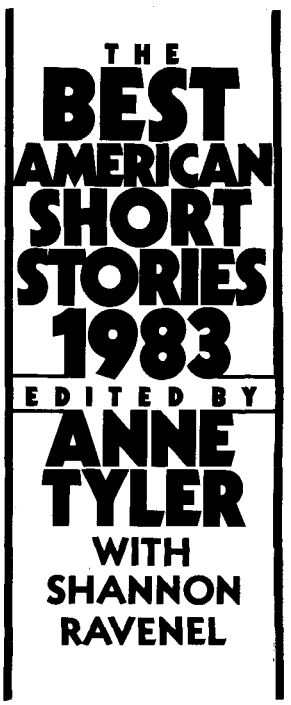

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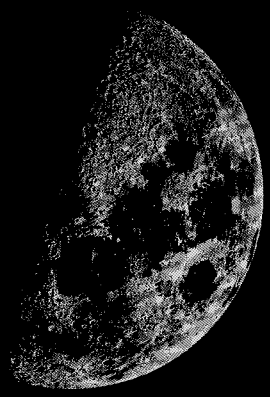

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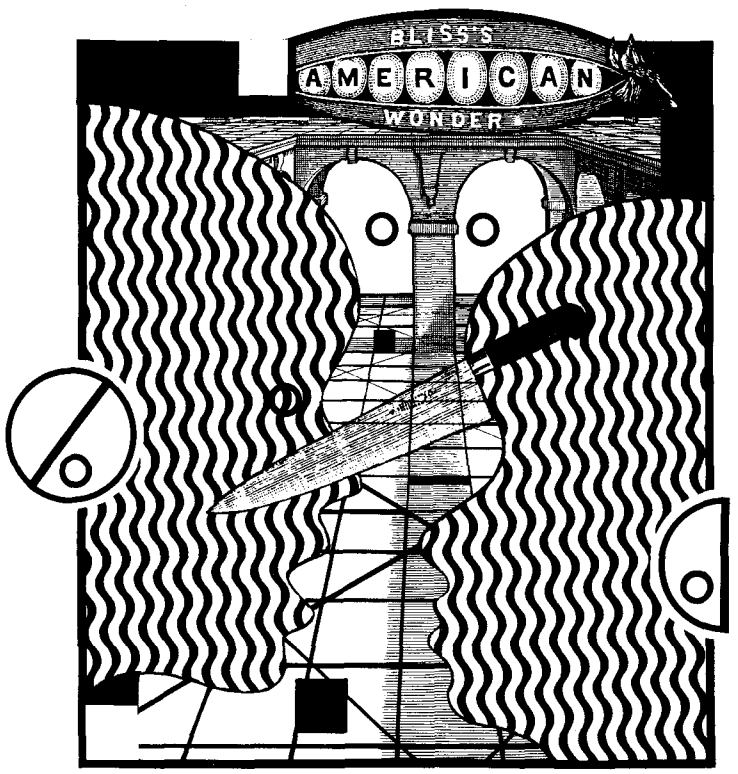
IF I DON'T GO NOW I NEVER WILL

JUSTINE BUISSON



They're both beginning to move out. Martha spends more time on the patio, sweeping around the plants, under lawn chairs, along the angled edge of the pool. Or she sits with the big dog beside her, reading the *American Poetry Review*, now and then glancing at the hanging plants suspended from beams of the overhang and crossbars of the screen. Harry heads for the backyard to tend his garden. He is growing beets and parsley and lettuce. All winter he has been extending the bed, until now it nearly reaches the neighbor's hedge. Every afternoon when he comes home he stands watering it, big, heavy-set, staring at his vegetables, hosing the banana tree, talking to the cat.

The process began with Martha. Or was it Harry who set it off when she clutched his feet, sobbing, "Talk to me." He gripped the pages of *Business Week*. "Turn the record over," he said. Martha went back to school, got a degree in education. Brett was eleven, Sherri thirteen. Now Martha teaches English at a junior high school. The students like her. Their grammar makes her wince, she deplores their misunderstandings of literature, but some of them display such eagerness. She finds herself lifted up, carried into a distant generation. It's a kind of immortality. Harry is an accountant. He thinks in debits, deductions. Their children are a continent away. Sometimes they phone collect.

Martha and Harry are at the dinner table, watching the evening news.

"Mr. Dirkson blew up over the P.A. again today," Martha says at a commercial break.

Harry studies the shapely young woman strolling toward them with a sugar-free drink in her hand. A perfect body, Martha thinks admiringly, without regret. "It would be a pleasure to switch," says Harry, taking a sip of beer.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Same old story."

The scene changes to a newscaster in Nicaragua. "I want to hear this," Harry says.

They eat silently, their eyes fastened on refugees fleeing their homes. "Where will we go?" a woman asks. Martha wonders how old she is. Thirty, maybe.

"How much did you pay for this?" Harry jabs a piece of steak into the air.

"It's a tough one, isn't it?"

"Can't you answer a question directly?"

"It was on special. I forget how much."

"Can't you buy a decent cut of meat? Who can eat this?" He shoves the steak to one side of his plate and pokes the potatoes, chews a forkful as he stares at women carrying children and bundles down a road far from there.

There was a time Martha would have left the room, biting her lip. Now she sits finishing her meal before she picks up the plates.

She has moved out farther than she expected. Another course at the university plunged her into poetry, which she dropped years ago. She had forgotten the power of words to chisel surprising shapes. Now she belongs to a workshop, her poems are being accepted by small quarterlies. Harry won't read them. "Just don't bring me into it," he says. She hardly ever does. He tells her she is playing a part. "Yes, me," she says.

She goes out in the evening without Harry now, to hear visiting lecturers, to see foreign films. She is taking a course on Sylvia Plath. When she gets home she finds Harry in front of the T.V., his glasses halfway down his nose, one hand holding a magazine, the other stroking the cat. Or his head has fallen sideways. He looks done for. She is afraid to touch him. She thinks of the young husband fishing beside her, jaunty and bright-eyed, cajoling fish out of northern streams. Sometimes, turning down his bed, she remembers a joke he once told her: "For sale. Twin beds. One in excellent condition." In the morning she's off to school when he gets up. "I'm leaving," she calls.

She doesn't go to church with him any more. "They're really out of touch," she says. "I hope you're sorting things out," Harry said a few months ago. Funny, it was always Martha who remembered the holy days, the fast days when they were young. It used to annoy Harry. "You had to remind me," he said. When he comes back from Mass now he hums in the kitchen. A nervous rendition of snatches of hymns.

He goes on Saturday evening to leave his Sundays

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free. Every Sunday he straps his canoe to the roof of his car and drives to the Everglades. He drifts around a lake only a few know about, stalking bass. Martha used to go with him after the children left, but the sun is too hot for her now and she hates being cramped in the boat so long. He no longer invites her.

For the past ten years Martha has walked out twenty times. They disagree about everything. When they talk they argue. Anything can set off a fight—the Vietnam War, Watergate, abortion, nuclear power plants. Martha's thinking has moved to the left, Harry's farther to the right. They infuriate each other. Once Martha dumped her plate into his lap. He smeared spaghetti on her face. The worst was the night she called him a bloodthirsty militarist, and he said, "Shut your mouth or I'll shut it for you."

Martha went into the kitchen and picked up a knife. She stood in the doorway and pointed it at him and said in a voice firm with determination, "Don't ever threaten me again."

She threw the knife behind her when she saw, as if in slow motion, Harry rising from his chair. He shoved her against the door jamb, pushed her back when she bounced forward. When she got up there was blood on the carpet. Harry, panting, turned and headed down the hall. Martha sobbed into the sink, dried her face, and picked up her handbag. She drove slowly to another teacher's house. "My God," said her friend, "what's he done to you?" "This time I'm leaving," Martha said. The next day she checked out furnished apartments, her stomach constricting at the view of discount sofas and huge ceramic lamps. What about Harry? He's dead, she thought with frightened clarity. He's killed himself. But his voice answered the phone, and she hung up. She stayed away a week, borrowing her friend's clothes, drinking herself to sleep every night. Harry begged her to see a marriage counselor with him. To avoid a lawyer, of course. The doctor, a thin, worried-looking man, sat in on their slow, partial, grudging insights. Now there are no more fights. They hardly ever talk.

It's wrong, it's immoral, Martha tells herself. I should make a clean break. Then she remembers the cheap upholstery of furnished rooms, the noisy cement corridors outside.

Lately Martha's direction has shifted. She bought a patio set—white coffee table, yellow-backed pipeline chairs and a chaise lounge. She turned a corner of the patio into a living room, with great aralias and dieffenbachias, and hung a blue-glazed della Robbia from the wall. Harry's comment when he came home, "Who are you going to entertain?" She answered, "Me." He poured himself a Scotch and went on drinking all evening. Martha lay on the chaise lounge reading Sylvia Plath.

She knows she is letting the house go. Every two weeks she changes the beds. She vacuums cat litter off the kitchen carpet. She gets rid of the newspapers. But she's drawn to the patio. It has been a hot winter, no rain in months, and since March she has been swimming twice a day. Harry says the water is too cold, but it's a challenge to Martha. She likes plunging into it early in the morning, doing her twenty laps. Morning and night she examines her plants, pokes a finger into pots. Is the soil moist enough? She pulls off brown leaves, beams at the multiplying spider plants. Every evening she waters the ferns.

This Friday it has been very hot. When she gets home from school, Martha peels off her clothes and dives naked into the pool. She forgets to count her laps and swims back and forth, feeling the strong, gentle water caress her breasts and thighs. She dreads the weekend ahead, the thought of bumping into Harry in the hall, having to step back from the refrigerator when he comes into the kitchen. She calls her teacher friend about going to a movie, but she's out.

Harry looks dragged down when he gets out of the car. His face is as gray as his hair. He gives her a questioning look as if to say, "What did you pull today?" He throws down his briefcase, disappears down the hall.

Martha goes to see the film alone. When she gets home, Harry is asleep in his chair, a television newscaster talking into the room. The door to the patio is shut, the house is stifling. Harry won't run the air-conditioning until June. Martha turns off the TV and Harry blinks his eyes. "I want to hear the news," he says. She switches it back on and goes to the bedroom. She takes off her clothes and puts on a housecoat and goes to the patio. Lobo comes to her, and she hugs him. "Good old boy." Under the pool light she reads. She feels relaxed, one with the tamed outdoors. A breeze veers toward her. She gets a light blanket and lies down on the chaise lounge in her dark, verdant corner, Lobo beside her.

"No, no! Have you hit bottom?"

It's Harry's voice, Harry standing beside the open door, huge, glaring down at her.

"You're sleeping with the dog now?"

She stares at him, her heart pounding.

"Get in here, Mart." He tries to pull her up, and knocks a plant off the table.

"I'm sleeping out here tonight."

"Goddamn bitch." Harry slams the door.

On her plastic and pipeline bed, Martha lies staring at a fern swaying beside the pool. She has been waiting for this. "I'm getting out. If I don't go now I never will." She sees herself up north again, driving into the sight of dogwood, walking through wet, budding woods. She can stay with her college friend Sarah until she finds a job, an apartment. For the rest of the night she doesn't sleep, except for brief lapses into nightmares.

The next morning she's up at dawn. She swims twenty laps, makes coffee, takes a cup to the chaise lounge and reads the paper. Harry is just getting up when she begins to sweep. He pushes past her without a word and takes the paper inside. Martha fetches a whisk broom and dust pan to sweep up the soil from the pot Harry knocked down. She grunts as she bends over, groans as she straightens up. In the living room, Harry slaps the newspaper, clears his throat.

This time she won't threaten to leave. She'll just go. She gets a notebook and writes: "Blue suit, three pairs pants. Cardigans. Blouses. London Fog. Walking shoes. One pair heels. Panty hose. Housecoat, winter night-

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gowns. Bras, panties. Plath, Levertov, Merwin, Rich. Notebook. Toilet articles."

Harry is out in the yard hacking branches. He swings the machete until the middle of the afternoon. Thump, there goes another branch. There are piles of them all over the yard.

He backs the station wagon over the grass up to the trees and starts shoving branches in. It's thundering, and the sky to the north is turning purple, but the rain will probably blow over again. Martha watches Harry from the patio, where she is checking Lobo for fleas. He stuffs huge armloads of bougainvillea, hibiscus, palm fronds into the back of the wagon. He looks grim. Today she won't lift a finger to help him.

He drives off to the dump, and she unlocks the storeroom and takes down a suitcase, carries it to the guest room, and slides it under the bed. She begins sorting clothes in the closet. These on the right to be taken. Then she picks up Lobo's leash and they go for a walk. He sniffs the grass, his jowls quivering with pleasure. She looks at the trees she has learned by heart—schefflera, live oak, bottle brush, traveller's palm. The mangoes are ripening, reddening to purple, hanging like little clowns' heads from the branches.

When she returns, Harry is getting ready for church.

"Where are my undershirts?"

Whiffs of his deodorant seize her as she slips off Lobo's choke collar. Harry is standing in the kitchen in his undershorts, sparkling clean, shaved, his clipped gray hair combed back. He glowers at her.

"Not one damn undershirt in the drawer. Where are you hiding them?"

"They're probably in the hamper."

"Now I'll have to wear a dirty one to church. Don't you even do the laundry any more?"

In ten minutes he's back, leather shoes, dress pants, sport coat. She is bending over Lobo, wondering how she can leave him behind.

Harry gives Martha and the dog a look of exasperation. "Close the windows if it rains." He lets the patio door slam behind him.

Martha is suddenly very tired. She fixes herself a drink and carries it to the patio. She picks up the latest issue of *Poetry* and stretches out on the chaise lounge.

Thunder is grumbling again, it has grown dark. Suddenly a shaft of sulfurous light startles her, presses her eyes to a hanging spider plant. She watches it flicker to the plant's offshoot. A blur of naked roots under thin striped leaves gripping the air. She shudders, sees the guest room in Sarah's stone house in the chilly northern spring. She never expected to take root here among tropical plants, enclosed by no more than a screen. So this is the place she has come to, after all her shaking free. A place where she and Harry move in concentric circles, sometimes touching.

A glare of lightning. The banana tree branches begin to thrash. The screens start heaving. Martha gets up heavily, pushes back the chairs and table, goes indoors with her empty glass. She moves from room to room closing windows, as a surge of rain hits them from the north, flooding her view. She thinks of Harry, hopes he'll stay off the road until the worst is over.

But there he is. He gets out of the car. The wind pushes him toward her.

Again, that questioning look. "I'm soaked."

"Why didn't you just pull off the road?"

"And wait for it to flood?"

She shakes her head, and goes to get him a towel as he bends to take off his shoes. □

JUDITH ROOT

MATINEE

The credits dissolve to OB/GYN.
A young man blinks too much
to read his FORTUNE or feel the music swell,
a close-up of sallow skin, pale against his eyes
where green and gold tunnel to his brain.

In the next frame, a woman's arms wrap around him,
cinching, loosening, then cinching.
Hands feather his cheeks, burrow and rustle in
chest hairs exposed by an open-collared shirt.
Then track and pan
nursing mothers and ladies with tumors,
all attentive to their own laps. One woman
points toward the window, "Look," she tells
her blond boy, "at the baby bird," a trick
that worked last week when sea turtles
mated at the zoo.
Now a tight shot.
The man frowns as the woman shifts,
tightens down, taking him like a jungle boa
who claims each small breath, lidless eyes
black with need. He turns a page as if to say,
maybe if I ignore her, she will go away.
Her arms circle his neck, fingers coax gold
chest hairs for coins that tremble her ears
with their musical cues. But there's no
big band, no high kicks, no
boy meets girl
boy loses girl
boy gets girl.
It's the follow-up, the consequences, the chorus
of nursing mothers and ladies with tumors I keep
step with when I stick my finger in the plot,
pull out the plum and shout, "Stop. Stop.
Don't you see what happened to us?"

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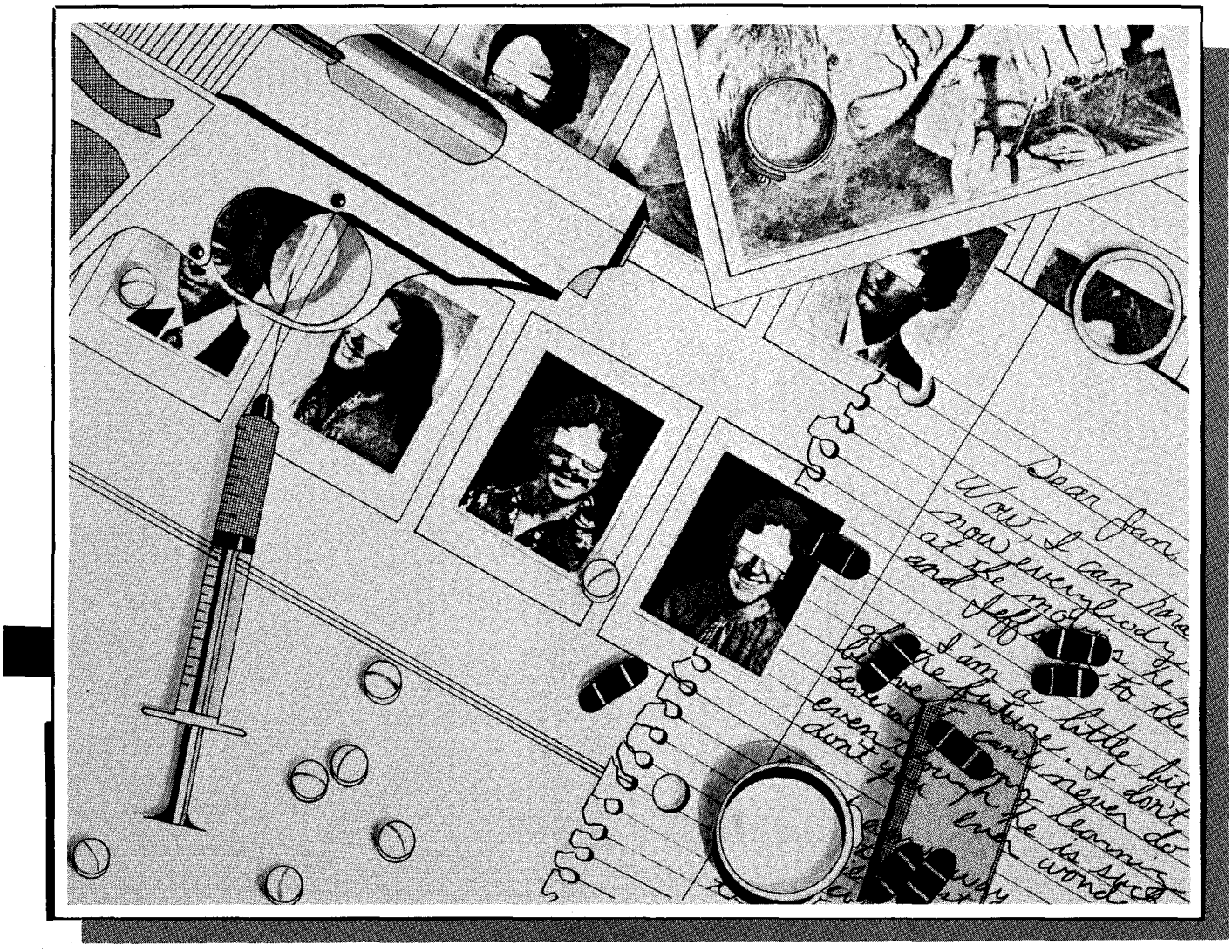
CLASS NOTES

LUCAS COOPER



TED MECHAM may be the first member of the Class of '66 to retire. I met him and his beautiful wife Kathy at a Buccaneers game in Tampa Bay in October. His investments in sugar refining and South American cattle have paid off handsomely. Any secret? "Yes," says Ted. "In and out, that's the key." Also in Florida, I saw JIM HASLEK and BILL STEBBINS. They left their families behind in Columbus and Decatur, respectively, to tune up a 1300-h.p. open-class, ocean racing boat, Miss Ohio, for trial runs near Miami. The racing season is set to open there in December, and Jim and Bill (famous for their Indy 500 pilgrimages) are among the favorites. JOHN PESKIN writes to say, sad to relay, that he has been sued by BILL TESKER. Bill, general manager at the Dayton office of TelDyne Industries, claims he gave John the idea for a sit-com episode which John subsequently sold to NBC. It all took place 16 years ago and is more than I can believe. RALPH FENTIL, handling the case for Bill, made it clearer. Ralph is director of Penalty, Inc., a franchised California paralegal service, which helps clients develop lawsuits. "This is a growing and legitimate consumer-interest area. We encourage people to come in, we go over their past. It's a potential source of income for the client. We let the courts decide what's right and wrong." Hmmm. RICHARD ENDERGEL phoned a few weeks ago from Houston, under arrest for possession of cocaine—third time since 1974. Richard thinks this is it. Unless a miracle happens he is looking at 15 years or more for dealing in a controlled substance. STANFORD CRIBBS, mangled practically beyond recognition in an automobile accident in 1979, took his own life on March 19, according to a clipping from the Kansas City *Star*. His former roommate, BRISTOL LANSFORD, has fared no better. Bristol was shot in the head by his wife's lover at the Lansfords' vacation home outside Traverse City.

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ROBERT DARKO of Palo Alto (where else?) sends word he is moving up very quickly at Mastuchi Electronics, and to thank DAVID WHITMAN. David, of Shoremann, Polcher & Edders, Los Angeles, specializes in celebrity and personality contracts. Bob Darko is the sixth middle-management executive hired in David's Free Corporate Agent draft. "Corporate loyalty is something from the fifties," says David. "I want to market people on a competitively-bid, short-term contract basis, with incentive and bonus clauses." Tell that to STEVEN PARKMAN. He has been living on unemployment benefits and his wife's income from a hairdressing concern since April of last year—with four kids. FRANK VESTA is certainly glad his job (in aerospace planning with General Dynamics of St. Louis) is holding up—he and wife Shirley had their ninth—a boy—in July. GREG OUTKIRK has grim news—daughter Michelle rode her thoroughbred Arabian, Botell III, off the boat dock in front of their Waukegan home in an effort to make the animal swim. It drowned almost immediately. DENNIS MITFORD, owner of a well known Nevada wh---house (no class discounts, he jokes), reports an unruly customer was shot on the premises in October by his bodyguard, LAWRENCE ADENSON. Larry, who served in Vietnam, says the publicity is awful. He may go back to New York—after Denny officially fires him for the violence. Violence is no stranger to BILL NAST. His wife turned up in terrible shape at Detroit General Hospital two months ago, the victim of Bill's hot temper. Fifth time in memory. Four hours in surgery? JACK ZIMMERMAN's second wife and two children by his first wife visited over Easter. Sue ZIMMERMAN was a 1978 Penthouse Pet. Jack is managing her modeling career, his entertainment career, *and* raising the kids. Kudos, Jack. TIM GRAYBULL is dead (of alcohol abuse) in Vermillion, South Dakota, where he taught English at the university. (Please let the editor of *Alumnus* know you want to see Tim's poems in a future issue.) ALEX ROBINSON won't say what films he distributes, but hints broadly that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," even in *that* area. The profit margin, he claims, is not to be believed. I'm reminded of KEVIN MITCHELL, who embezzled $3.2 million from Sperry Tool in 1971. He periodically calls from I-know-not-where. Kevin was home free in 1982, with the expiration of the case. DONALD OVERBROOK—more bad news—is in trouble with the police again for an unrequited interest in young ladies, this time in Seattle. JAMES COLEMAN called to say so. Jim and his wife Nancy are quitting their jobs to sail around the world in their 32′ ferrocement boat. Nancy's parents died and left them well-off. "We were smart *not* to have kids," Jim commented. HAROLD DECKER writes from Arkansas that he is angry about Alumni Association fund-raising letters that follow him everywhere he goes. "I haven't got s---, and wouldn't give it if I did." Wow. NORMAN BELLOWS has been named managing editor of *Attitude*. He says the magazine's 380,000 readers will see a different magazine under his tutelage—"aimed at aggressive, professional people. No tedious essays." Norm's erstwhile literary companion in New York, GEORGE PHILMAN (Betsy BELLOWS and George are living together, sorely testing that close friendship from *Spectator* days) reports *Pounce* is doing very well. George's "funny but vicious" anecdotes about celebrities appear bi-weekly in the fledgling, nationally-syndicated column. "At first the humor went right by everyone," says George, feigning disbelief. "George is an a--h---," was GLEN GREEN's observation when I phoned. Glen opens a five-week show in Reno in January (and *he* will see to it that you get a free drink *and* best seats in the house). Another class celebrity, actor BOYD DAVIDSON, has entered Mt. Sinai, Los Angeles, for treatment of cocaine and Percodan addiction. Dr. CARNEY OLIN, who broke a morphine habit at Mt. Sinai in 1979, thinks it's the best program in the country. Carney says he's fully recovered and back in surgery in the Phoenix area. THOMAS GREENVILLE's business brochure arrived in the mail last week. He has opened his fifteenth *Total Review* salon. Tom combines a revitalizing physical-fitness program with various types of modern therapy, like est, to provide clients with brand new life-paths. Some sort of survival prize should go to DEAN FRANCIS. MBA Harvard 1968. Stanford Law 1970. Elected to the California State Assembly in 1974, after managing Sen. Edward Eaton's successful '72 election campaign. In 1978, elected to Congress from California's 43rd District. It all but collapsed like a house of cards last fall. A jealous brother-in-law, and heir to the Greer fortune, instigated a series of nasty suits, publicly denounced Dean as a fraud, and allegedly paid a woman to sexually embarrass him. Dean won reëlection, but the word is his marriage is over—and Phyllis Greer FRANCIS will go to court to recover damages from her brother. A sadder story came to light when I met DOUGLAS BRAND for drinks after the Oklahoma game last fall. Doug's wife Linda went berserk in August and killed their three children. She's in prison. Doug said he used to bait her to a fury with tales of his adulteries and feels great remorse. BENJAMIN TROPPE has been named vice-president for marketing for Temple Industries of Philadelphia. BERNARD HANNAH is new corporate counsel to Conrad Communications, Atlantic City. HENRY CHURCH was killed by police in Newark for unspecified reasons. Well known painter DAVID WHITCOMB moved to Guatemala and left no forwarding address (Dave?). FREDERICK MANDELL weeps uncontrollably in his crowded apartment in Miami Beach. JOEL REEDE lives in self-destructive hatred in Rye, New York. JAY LOGAN has joined insurgency forces in Angola. ADRIAN BYRD travels to the Netherlands in the spring to cover proceedings against the Federal Government at The Hague for *Dispatch*. GORDON HASKINS has quit the priesthood in Serape, a violent New Mexican border town, to seek political office. ANTHONY CREST succeeds father Luther (Class of '36) as chairman of Fabré. DANIEL REDDLEMAN continues to compose classical music for the cello in Hesterman, Tennessee. ODELL MASTERS cries out in his dreams for love of his wife and children. PAUL GREEN, who never married, farms 1200 acres in eastern Oregon with his father. ROGER BOLTON, who played professional baseball for nine years, lost his family in flooding outside New Orleans and has entered a Benedictine monastery. (Paul Jeffries, 1340 North Michigan, Chicago, IL 60602.) □

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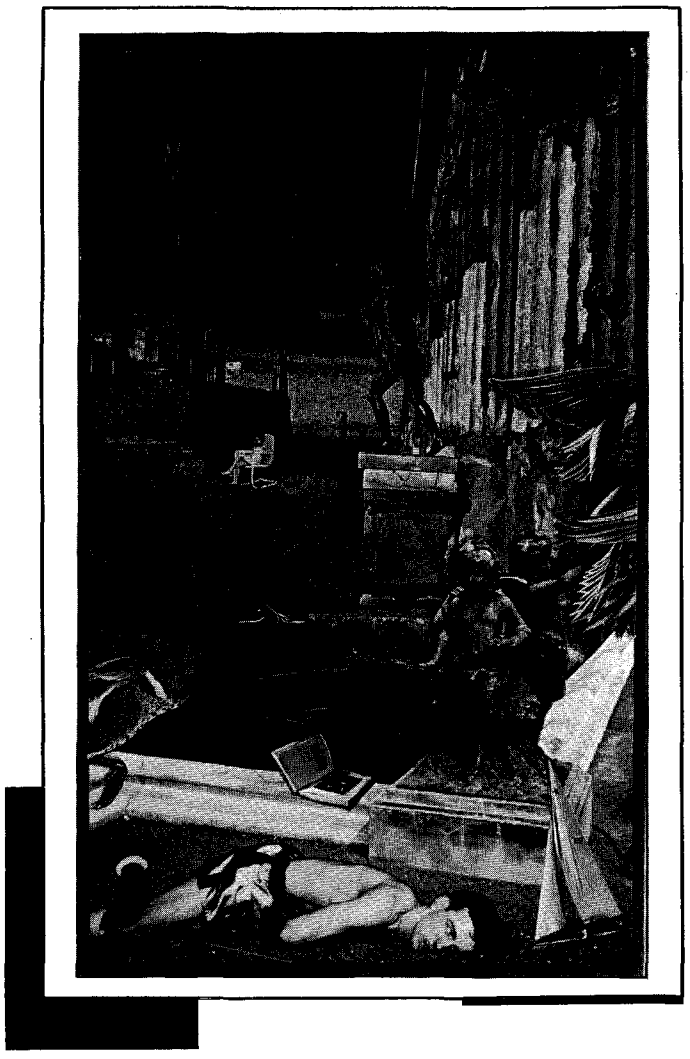
FLIES

J. HARLEY McILRATH



A fly is stuck in a small pool of blood at my grandfather's feet. "It's probably Nancy's," he shouts. "The radio said she had head injuries." We're standing in a dusty roadside ditch strewn with bits of metal and broken glass. In the brown and green weeds to one side of the ditch is a rusty barbed wire fence, on the other side my grandmother and uncle lean against Grandpa's dirty brown Oldsmobile. In the back seat of the car my two aunts are holding each other and crying loudly—Nancy was their friend.

We didn't come here because Nancy was my aunts' friend though. We came because there was an accident. Last month we drove about twenty miles to see where some farmer's barn burned down and on the way back saw a semi on its side in the ditch. The minute an accident or fire or something is reported on the radio Grandpa gets everyone into the car and tries to find it. This accident happened earlier in the day but Grandpa was butchering a hog so we couldn't come until now. Four girls from my aunts' high school class were horsing around out here in a car and met a milk truck head on coming over the hill. The wrecked car and truck have already been towed away. We'll probably drive by the DX on the way home and see them. For some reason they always take the wrecks to the DX.

Grandpa's boots leave prints in the soft black dirt dug up by the car when it slid into the ditch. He's searching around in the weeds for junk left over from the accident—he finds a broken mirror. I'm still standing by the blood. Grandma yells down at me, "Now you be careful not to cut yourself on any of that glass. I'd never hear the end of it from your father if I brought you home hurt." I can hear my aunts screaming in the car. Grandpa hears them too. "Aren't those girls gonna get out? What the hell'd they come for if they ain't gonna get out?"

The blood doesn't look any different than the blood from the hog Grandpa butchered today, except there was a lot more of it from the hog. The hog was hung by its hind legs from the top of the machine shed door and when Grandpa slit its throat the blood came gushing out and filled the mud holes in the doorway like water from the eavespouts when it rains really hard, only the blood was steamy and red. I wonder if this is all of Nancy's blood or just some of it. Maybe it's just the blood from her head. I also wonder why there isn't anyone else's blood around. Probably because Nancy's the only one that died, if the others had died their blood would be here too.

"Jesus Christ! Drive all the way out here and they're just gonna sit in the car!"

"Harold, you leave them girls alone. They don't have to get out if they don't want to. Don't you want to get out and look around, girls?" My aunts just cry. Grandma always sticks up for my aunts. One time one of 'em

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knocked me down and gave me a bloody nose and all Grandma said was not to get any blood on her new carpet. She's really a pretty good grandma though, we always watch the noon movie together.

I'd like to pick that fly out of the blood but I can't think of how to do it without getting my hand all messy. I don't think I'd like getting any of that blood on me. My mother told me not to play around the blood in the machine shed but I don't think I would've anyway. It smelled really bad. Grandpa scooped the blood from the mud holes with a shovel and threw it on the drive-way but it still stunk and drew a lot of flies. I couldn't even stand and look at it very well because the flies wouldn't leave me alone.

There aren't many flies around Nancy's blood. Just the one that's stuck and a couple more buzzing around. Maybe flies don't like people's blood as much as hogs' blood. I don't know why they'd like hogs' blood any better though, it really doesn't look any different.

My grandfather's climbing up the bank to the car, so we're probably going to leave. He's still got the mirror he found and an antenna. He slips on some gravel on the bank and almost falls because he can't use his hands since he's holding the junk. It's pretty funny but I don't laugh. Grandpa doesn't like to be laughed at. Once when he bought a really sick looking calf at the sale barn by accident, my uncle laughed at him and when we got home he hit my uncle really hard on the head a bunch of times. Of course he bought us ice cream at the sale barn but it still wasn't too great of him to hit my uncle on the head so hard.

"Let's go, Little Harold!" They always call me "little" Harold so I know they're talking to me and not Grandpa. I take a good look at the blood before I go. It's kinda hard to see the fly now. It buried itself trying to get unstuck so all you can see is a little lump in the blood where it is. I climb the bank on all fours being careful not to get cut on anything. Grandpa gives my uncle the antenna and throws the broken mirror back into the ditch. My uncle gets in the back of the car with my aunts and I sit between Grandpa and Grandma in the front.

I stand on my knees in the seat and look out the back window as Grandpa pulls onto the road and a cloud of dust comes up behind us kinda like the car's on fire and all the smoke's goin' out the back. My aunts' eyes are all buggy from crying so much and their faces are all red—they're sniffling a lot. Grandpa doesn't say anything because he's mad at my aunts for not getting out and because it bothers him when people sniffle. Grandma won't say anything because she's mad at Grandpa for bothering my aunts and my uncle won't say anything because he's afraid of getting hit. My aunts both look at me. They hate it when I sit backwards in the front seat. "You should've got out. There was this really great blood with a fly in it."

My aunts start crying again. They'll probably cry all the way to the DX. □

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

19th CENTURY PORTRAITS

This is just before photography. Subject after subject,
the artist has tried for the greatest accuracy

immortalizing allows. In fact, for many
of these people their pictures must be what their understanding

of the next world is: this world
with its parks and parlors and little meetings in the hall, only

heightened. Benjamin West's *The Bard* is anybody—with a harp,
charged with power, on a mountain, in a storm. In a way, all art

defines the afterlife. Paint has given him
fixity, and he shouts in unshakeable light.

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ORDER AND DISORDER

LEE MERRILL BYRD

There were three sets of clothes on Bunnie Gottisman's bed. The set nearest the foot of the bed, neatly laid out, was for her husband, Ira. He would be wearing white linen slacks and a powder-blue V-neck sweater of soft cashmere and, as though to insist that these were the clothes he would wear, Bunnie had smoothed them over and over again with her determined hand. In the V of the sweater she had put his gold necklace, the one that set his strong chest off to such advantage; she had formed a perfect circle with it and clasped it firmly shut. Below the carefully pressed slacks, she laid a fresh pair of socks, side by side. A tin of brown shoe polish sat directly below the socks, on the floor, with a soft rag folded on top to remind her to shine Ira's shoes the minute he came home from the plant.

Next to Ira's clothes were the clothes that she would wear. At the very top, where her head would be if she were lying down, was a powder blue and white scarf to fix in her hair. She had tied it softly and made the ends even, exactly the way she would later when she put it on. Beside it were her earrings, tiny white pearls with gold posts. Right below the first scarf was a smaller one, all white, that she would place at her neck to accent the V of the cashmere sweater that was just like Ira's, and, like Ira's, it was encircled with jewelry. But Bunnie had several necklaces—each one a different length—to draw the eye toward her breasts, which were still firm and youthful. She would be wearing white linen slacks, too. Below them, on the floor next to Ira's tin of shoe polish, she had placed her shoes, open-toed high heels of the same powder-blue as her sweater.

The last set of clothes was folded in a pile at the top of the bed. These were for her son, Barry: a three-piece suit of a blue a shade darker than their sweaters; a white man-tailored shirt; a pair of white shoes with white socks edged in blue.

She would have to make a decision. Barry would need a warm jacket as soon as it got dark. There was the new one with the hood that her mother had just sent but that jacket was red and did not match. There was a second, a blue pea jacket that had been Ira's when he was a baby. Bunnie had had it dry-cleaned a month ago in readiness for the party, but when she put it down on the bed between her outfit and Ira's she found the color too somber. It was depressing. It reminded her of winter and she hated winter. Since the red did not match and the blue was depressing, they would leave before it got dark, no matter what Ira said.

It was two and Ira would be home by four to take them. Bunnie sat down on the edge of the bed, careful not to sit on any of the clothes she had laid out so neatly on her smooth spread. Downstairs in the kitchen she could hear the maid cleaning up after lunch. She leaned forward to look out the bedroom window into the back yard. There was Stephanie down below, sitting primly on the swing in her blue ruffled party dress. Her hair was braided and the braids were looped and tied with blue and white ribbons.

The leaves on the vines and on the trees were turning red. Some had fallen, staining the trim green lawn. Stephanie had picked up a leaf and was talking to it. Bunnie watched the serious turn of her face and the little mouth moving up and down.

"Summer is over," said Bunnie out loud. She stood up close to the window for a long time, looking at Stephanie framed in the colors of autumn and then she turned and inspected the pile of clothes for Barry and sat down again and re-arranged them so that the white shirt was tucked inside the vest and the vest was inside the suit jacket and the shoes, with the socks in them, sat right below the pants.

"There," she said, "you look very nice." She tugged at the sleeves of the jacket to make them straight. "See how nice you look," she said.

She took a bath and sat on the edge of her bed wrapped in a towel while she put electric rollers in her hair. She could hear Stephanie's footsteps on the stairs. Stephanie was talking to herself.

"No, I can't come outside, not now, not when I am ready for the party," she told the friend of her imagination. "Bows in my hair, clean socks, ruffles, we are going to Amy's party"—her voice rose—"and *you* can't come."

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"Mommy?" Stephanie stood at the door.

"What, Stephie?"

"Is it time for the party yet?"

"No." Bunnie looked at the clock. "Just a little bit more and Daddy will be home to take us. Where is your present? Show me where your present is."

Stephanie went back down the stairs, step-step on each step, her hand squeaking on the banister.

"And don't get dirty."

Bunnie's hair was ash-blonde, long and thick. She combed it out. The curl had taken just right, the waves over her temples were neither too tight nor too loose, the back had just enough body for a ponytail, her trademark since high school. She pivoted slowly to look at it in the mirror; it was exactly the way she liked it. She leaned forward to study her face. Of all the women who would be at the party today, Bunnie was the only one who cared about the way she looked. She was always being mistaken for a teenager while her old friends looked old. Rivie Schwartz was even getting gray hair—and she didn't do a thing about it.

"Rivie," said Bunnie, addressing the orderly row of cosmetic bottles on her bureau, "it's no crime to keep yourself up, you know. You could lose ten, even twenty pounds and put some color on your hair and you'd be gorgeous." What was the use? Rivie never listened. Rivie had a theory, and her theory was that as long as you were happy it didn't matter what you looked like.

"Why won't you ever listen to me, Rivie?" Bunnie asked the mirror. "I can't tell you anything."

She turned away from the bureau and got the blue and white scarf off the bed, wrapping it around the ponytail so that the ends of the scarf were perfectly balanced. With a tiny brush she applied a rich coral-colored lipstick, taking pains to follow the exact shape of her mouth. She stood back and looked at herself. She looked good.

The clock on the dresser said a quarter to three. Bunnie unwrapped the towel and put on a pair of baby-blue bikini underpants and a matching bra that held her very high. With a robe to cover her until she got dressed, she sat down again on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. She had to talk to Ira. She dialed the plant.

"Ira? It's me. Listen, come home a little early, will you, so you can bathe."

Ira's secretary was in his office, asking him a question. "Tell them to do it now," Bunnie heard him tell the girl. He sounded tired.

"Ira?" said Bunnie.

"I took a bath this morning," he snapped into the phone.

"That was hours ago, Ira. You know how you sweat. Listen . . . are you there, Ira?" There was muffled conversation between him and the secretary. "Ira? Can't you talk to her later?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Go ahead."

"Listen. I'm going to lay out your blue sweater, the one with the V-neck. And what pants? Your white slacks?"

"Come on, Bunnie. It's just a picnic. Something casual."

"Your white slacks *are* casual, Ira."

"Some jeans. There's a pair in my closet back from the cleaners."

"Ira. You look much better in those slacks."

"The guys'll be playing ball, for godsakes."

"Ira?"

"What?"

"I have your white slacks laid out already. With the blue sweater. It took me two hours to decide."

"Bunnie. . . ."

"We were going to look real nice," she said quickly.

"Listen." She heard him tapping his fingers on top of his desk. "Everyone there is going to be wearing jeans. O.K.? Have you ever seen Rivie Schwartz in anything but jeans and Fay . . . Fay and Becky'll be wearing jeans and all the kids'll have on whatever. It's just a picnic, Bunnie."

He had his hand over the phone again, talking to the girl.

"Ira? Ira?" said Bunnie frantically. "Stephanie has on her blue party dress, the one with the ruffles with the white pinafore and the white tights. Ira?"

"Yeah. O.K." she heard him say to the secretary.

"She looks real cute, Ira. Her hair's in braids with blue ribbons."

He was back on the line. "You dress her up too much, Bunnie," he said flatly. "She won't have any fun. Put on the little shorts and the top your mother sent and some sneakers."

"I can't do that. I spent all morning getting her ready."

"So what?"

"No, that's what!"

"Now don't go getting upset, Bunnie."

"I'm not upset, Ira. Do you hear me? I'm not upset. We just won't look good. If Rivie Schwartz wants to look that way, let her. If she wants her kids running around looking like slobs, let her. But I'm not going to do that, Ira. I'm just not going to do that."

"O.K. . . . O.K. . . . Bunnie? Listen. Don't cry. Come on now, don't cry."

The secretary was talking again. "Later," he said to her sharply, "I'm on the phone.

"Bunnie? You O.K.?"

"Yeah."

"Listen. What's Barry wearing?"

"He's sleeping."

"He is? Maybe he'll still be sleeping. We'll leave him home. Tina can watch him."

"Leave him home? What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"O.K. O.K. Don't yell, Bunnie. I was just trying to help you out."

"We said we weren't going to leave him home."

"Yeah."

"Remember?"

"Yeah. Well. . . ."

"What?"

"Ask Tina will she come, too."

"To the party?"

"Yeah. Why not?"

"You can't take a maid. . . ."

"Yeah, you can. Yeah, you can. Let Tina carry him.

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He's too heavy for you now. You won't have to be walking around carrying him the whole time."

She didn't answer.

"Yeah, tell her. Tell her I'll pay her a little extra. She can have Saturday night off, too, she wants it. Yeah. Then you can sit around and talk to the girls the way you've been wanting to. You haven't been out in a long time."

Bunnie put her hand out and touched the blue suit she had fixed for Barry. She stared at the polished shoes.

"Listen, baby," Ira said. "I got to get off. I got some stuff I have to do before I leave." He hung up.

Stephanie was back with the present.

"Why are you crying, Mommy?"

"Come here, come here," said Bunnie, holding her arms out for Stephanie. She picked her up and put her down next to Barry's suit and then she sat down on her knees beside the bed with her arms still around Stephanie.

"It makes me sick," she said. "See how beautiful you are. See how beautiful you look—the little ruffles, the blue dress."

"Don't cry, Mommy."

"I have to. I have to cry. It makes me feel so sick. God, what will I do?" She got up and carried Stephanie into the nursery. Barry lay in his crib, still sleeping.

"Daddy says to wear shorts and sneakers," whispered Bunnie. "Is that what you want to wear, is shorts and sneakers?"

"Shorts and sneakers?"

"He says, 'Wear shorts and sneakers', and Barry should come with Tina."

"Tina?"

"'So I can sit and talk to the girls', he says."

She put Stephanie in a little red chair in a corner of the nursery, and then she knelt down and began to unbuckle her party shoes. Stephanie pinched her lips together and squinted at her mother.

"Mommy? Is Barry one years old yet?"

"No."

"Is Mona?"

"No."

"How old is she?"

"Six months."

"Is Barry six months?"

"No, Barry is nine months. Let me have your other foot . . . and Stephie?"

"What?"

"Let's not talk right now, O.K., sweetheart? I got a headache."

"Mommy? Mona can sit up."

"Yeah. O.K."

"She's a nice little baby. You know what she does, Mommy?"

"Stephie . . ."

"When you hold her, she licks your face. She pulls your hair."

"Stop! please stop. . . ."

Bunnie pushed Stephanie's legs away from her. She stood up and tried to look through Stephanie's bureau for her shorts but her eyes were full of tears and she felt so tired suddenly that she left the nursery and went back into her room. She pulled the bedspread off so that the clothes, which had been as orderly as soldiers, fell to the floor in confusion. She got in underneath the covers and tried to get warm.

Stephanie came into the room, red-faced and miserable, and stood next to the bed.

"Mommy? The clothes are all over the floor."

"It doesn't matter anymore," Bunnie said.

"Mommy? What shall I wear?"

"What do you want to wear?"

"I don't know. Can't you help me?"

"No. I'm going to sleep for awhile."

Stephanie crawled up next to her mother. Bunnie curled around her and shivered. She shut her eyes and tried to rest, but couldn't; she opened them again and stared absently at the closet doors that lined the wall of her bedroom. There was a crack in the ceiling above them. There must be a leak somewhere.

"If ever there was a crack in the ceiling at home when I was growing up," Bunnie said out loud, "Mother told Father and Father fixed a bucket of plaster and patched it over." Bunnie raised herself up and looked at Stephanie to see if she had heard, but Stephanie was half asleep and didn't answer.

Bunnie rolled over and stared out the back windows. From where she lay she could see the tops of the old oak trees in whose patriarchal shadows they had imagined the seasons of their lives would pass. It was for those watchful trees and the sloping yard they shaded that Bunnie and Ira Gottisman had bought this old house.

Bunnie remembered the day they had first stood at these windows. She was pregnant then, with Barry. Ira held Stephanie in his arms, so she could look out the windows at the trees and the yard.

"All the children of all our friends will come and play in our back yard," Bunnie remembered herself saying, "because it is so big and because these trees will make it dark and cool, even on the hottest days in summer." The three of them stared down, imagining. "We'll have birthday parties and wienie roasts and picnics . . . and a sandbox—right underneath the trees—with a wading pool and a swing set beside it. When the kids get older, they can play tag, using the trees for bases."

"And in the autumn," Ira had interjected solemnly, "we'll play football. All the fathers and all their sons."

"Yes," Bunnie remembered she had agreed, her voice as serious as his.

"Because it wasn't going to be anything else but a boy," she said out loud. "One girl and one boy. Everybody knows that."

Bunnie Gottisman heard the car pull in the driveway. She frowned at the clock. 3:20.

"Here comes your father," she said. She held herself tight, imagining the front door opening. Ira would bustle inside. "Why aren't you ready?" he'd say. "Come on, come on, what's your problem?" She shut her eyes.

He slammed the front door shut. "I'm home, honey!"

"Here we are, Daddy!" called Stephanie, sitting up in bed.

Bunnie heard him take the steps, two at a time. He

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stood at the bedroom door. "Bunnie? What's the matter? Why aren't you ready?"

"Are we going to the party, Daddy?" asked Stephanie, bouncing up and down on the bed.

"Of course we're going to the party. Now give Daddy a kiss and then run down and tell Tina to get ready to go. Hurry."

Ira came around the bed to where he could see Bunnie's face. "What are you doing?" he asked her.

"I'm asleep," she said.

"What do you mean, you're asleep?"

"I'm asleep."

"What about the party?"

"I'm not going to the party."

"What do you mean, you're not going to the party? You've been talking about nothing else but this party for months."

"I mentioned it twice, Ira."

"Twice! You said, 'Amy's birthday, Amy's birthday' ever since Barry was born. 'When Rivie has Amy's birthday, in September, I'll go out', you said. 'I'll sit down and I'll talk to the girls', that's what you said. Remember what you said, Bunnie?"

"But now I'm not going. I'm not going to go to any party wearing jeans."

"Is that what it is? Now you're going to blame it on me, because I want to wear jeans, huh?"

"And Stephanie in shorts and sneakers. I can't do it, Ira."

He sat down in a chair next to the bed. "Bunnie, get this through your head. It's just a picnic, see? It's a picnic for Amy's birthday. It's all our friends, what we've known all our lives. It's at the park, Greenbrook Park, where we used to play when we were kids. Remember, Bunnie? Come on, did you ever go to Greenbrook Park in a ruffled dress?"

"My mother always got us dressed up, Ira. I always wore a ruffled dress and my mother wore her . . . white linen slacks and her blue cashmere sweater and my father wore his to match. And they looked very nice, Ira Gottisman. Don't you remember how nice my mother and father always looked. And everyone always said, 'Look at the Farbers. Aren't the Farbers a perfectly beautiful family?'"

"Bunnie. . . ."

"That's the way it always was, Ira."

"You've been in the house too long, Bunnie."

She started to cry. He leaned over and touched her hair.

"We have to go," he said.

"You go, Ira. You go and take Stephanie, put her in her shorts and sneakers and you wear your jeans. Everybody will be real glad to see you."

"They want to see you, Bunnie. Everybody loves you."

"Well, I don't love them. I don't want to see any of them or any of their goddamn kids, do you hear me, Ira?"

"Yeah. . . ." Her shouting frightened him. He sat without knowing what to do while Bunnie turned away from him and cried. He relaxed in the chair, studying his hands, nearly falling asleep, waiting. When he opened his eyes, she had turned back and was looking at him. "Ira?" she said. "It's too much."

"No, it's not, Bunnie." He leaned forward and smoothed her hair away from her forehead. "It's going to be fine, sweetheart. Everyone will be so glad to see us. We're going to look good—I promise—the way we always do. You always look good, Bunnie, no matter what you wear, you always look so good. And I'll look good. Everyone will say, 'Look how good that Ira Gottisman looks in his jeans and his blue sweater.'" Bunnie smiled at him. "'Who's that mysterious lady he's with?' they'll wonder. 'My God! It's Bunnie Gottisman! And would you look at those incredible jeans she's wearing!'" That made Bunnie laugh. "'And see there, there's little Stephanie Gottisman in her sparkling shorts and sneakers. . . .'"

But he had lost her. She was looking past him, out the window to the yard and the old oak trees and she was crying again. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the floor.

"Everyone will want to tell us, Ira."

"No, they won't, Bunnie."

"Yeah, they will. 'I know a doctor here, there's a doctor there. There's a home in Hackensack for kids like that.'" She put her hands over her face. "Rivie Schwartz will say, 'That's a nice home up there in Hackensack, it's not like you've heard of with the long dull lonely rooms where they live for a thousand years strapped in iron beds shitting all over themselves, oh, it's real pretty, Bunnie . . .'"

"Shut up, Bunnie."

"They'll have all kinds of advice, Ira, everyone will want to tell us."

"You're dreaming, Bunnie."

"I'm dreaming?!"

He grabbed her arm. "It's just his eyes, right? You tell them we've been to the doctor's, bunch of doctors, they say it's just his eyes, when they fix his eyes he's gonna be just like everyone else. Basketball, football, college, the works. . . ."

"Come off it, Ira."

"There's nothing wrong with him!"

"Don't yell at me, Ira. Come on, don't you yell at me. Where are you all day, for godsakes?"

"Where am I? Where am I? What do you mean, where am I? I'm down at that goddamn plant seven days a week trying to keep it from falling apart. Where the hell you want me to be?"

She sat up, throwing the bedclothes off her legs. "I want you to be home, Ira. If you were home, you wouldn't say that."

Ira got up out of the chair and turned away from her, toward the back windows.

"Nine months old and he can't even hold his head up," she said.

She watched his back as he stared out over their yard. There were gray circles of sweat under his arms and his shirt was wrinkled. Was he remembering the game of football every father plays with his son?

"There's something wrong with him, Ira," she said. "There is." She kicked at one of the blue cashmere sweaters that lay on the floor. "There's something so wrong with him."

Bunnie got up off the bed and went to her closet. She

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pushed aside some dresses and felt for her pants. There was a black pair of jeans that were bell bottoms. She pulled them off the hanger and put them on. In the back of her closet were shelves where she kept clothes that she intended to give away, and she grabbed a cotton jersey from there and jerked it over her head. It fell to her hips like a sack, in black and brown stripes. She stood in front of the mirror looking at herself, watching what she could of Ira's trembling back, and the tears ran all down her face.

"There," she said. "Do you think Rivie Schwartz will like that? Do you think I look hopeless enough to be the mother of. . . ."

But he was behind her already, holding her, and she couldn't stop crying.

"Oh, my God," she said, over and over again, "what will we ever do?"

"Sssssh, sssssh," he whispered. "Don't cry." He took her away from the mirror, over to the bed, and he made her sit down.

"Don't cry," he said again. She watched his shoes as he stood, inert and helpless, in front of her, the way he always stood when he didn't know what to do. Finally he went away. She heard him on the other side of the bed. He had picked up all the clothes that she had laid out so carefully for the picnic and brought them back beside her. With shaking hands, he spread them out again for her to see.

"Was it like this?" he asked her, smoothing the clothes the way he knew she would have done. She nodded solemnly.

"Here," he said. He cleared his throat. "Lift your arms up." He pulled the shapeless jersey over her head. He took the cashmere sweater and he put it on her, tugging it lightly at the waist. He held out the white linen slacks and he made her take the jeans off and put the white slacks on. He slipped on her shoes, the open-toed high heels of powder-blue and then he found the necklaces she had set out and he put them on her, one by one, adjusting them so that they would look just the way he knew she liked them to look, and then he put in her earrings—the white pearls—his broad, trembling fingers awkward with the gold posts.

"Come here," he said, and he led her over to her bureau and combed her long, thick hair and straightened the ends of her scarf so that they were perfectly balanced and powdered her face carefully so that no one would know.

"There," he said. "See how pretty you are. See how beautiful." □

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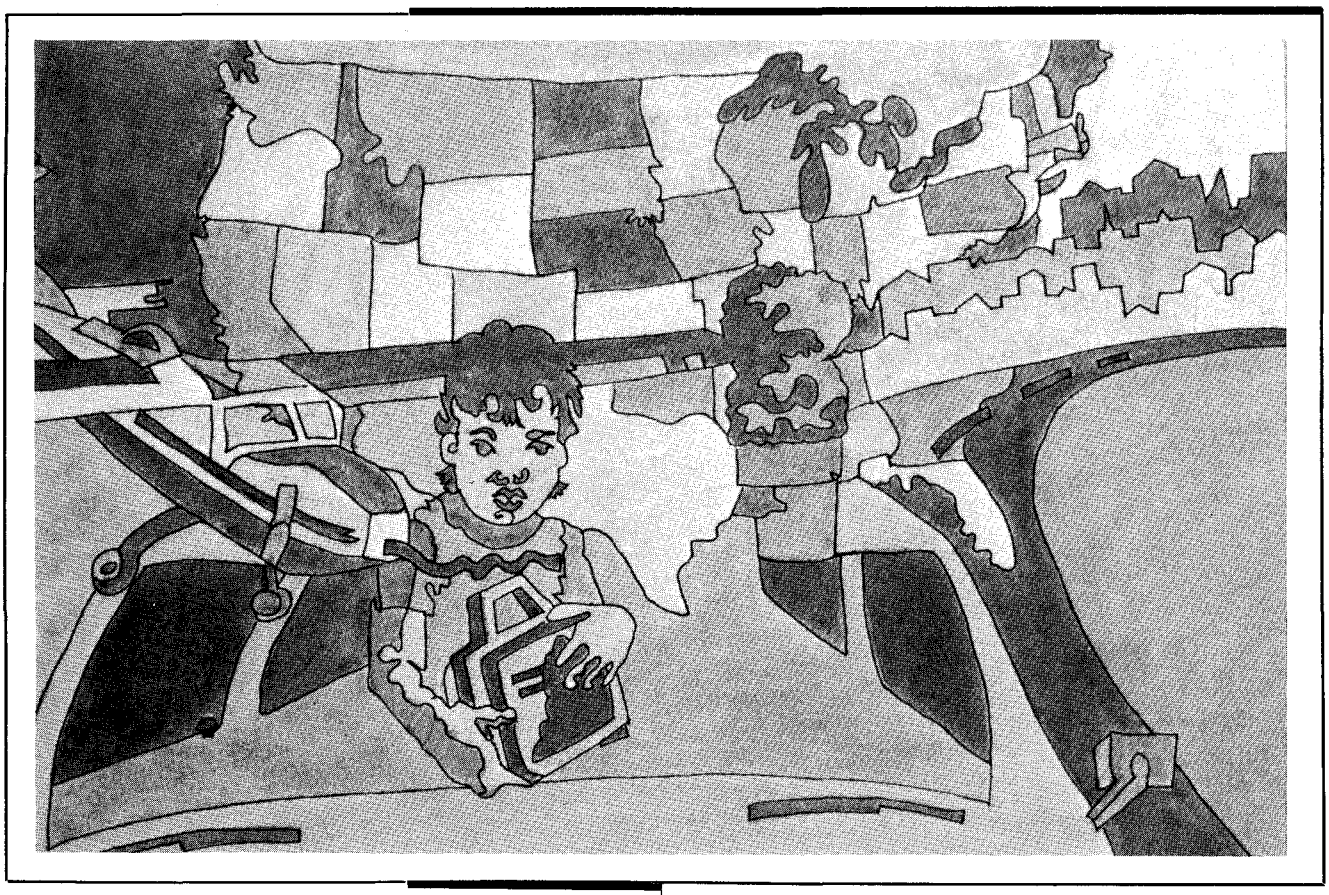
THE KIDNAPPERS

PAMELA PAINTER



Her father had given her a new coloring book. He would only be in his lawyer's office a few minutes, he said. Ellie wanted to wait in the car and so he showed her how to push the button to lock it, how to pull the button up when he wanted back in. Not to open the door for anyone. He insisted they practice once. Then he stood looking at her for a moment through the window before he waved and jogged across the street.

It was a Wonder Woman coloring book. Ellie flipped through it, then turned back to the first page and started on the red and blue outfit Wonder Woman always wore. She had finished the top that looked more like a bathing suit when a rapping on the window made her go way over the line. A woman in a green scarf and big sunglasses was calling her name, "Ellie, let me in."

"Mom," Ellie cried before pulling up the button. They both were crying as Ellie's mother pulled her from the car and together they ran down the sidewalk toward a red station wagon, Jane's car, her mother's writer-friend. Ellie scrambled across the front seat under the wheel and her mother followed and slammed the door. She pulled off the scarf and threw it into the back seat.

"God, Ellie." Their wet faces touched, then she started the car and pulled away, the wheels scraping the sidewalk edge.

"We are going home," her mother said, her voice trembled "home." She drove with one hand, holding Ellie's with the other. Maps crunched under Ellie's feet.

"Right now?" Ellie said. To her room, her toys, her friends.

"Right, now. We're on our way." Her mother snapped her sunglasses off and put them on the seat. The buildings grew shorter beside piles of garbage as they drove faster than usual away from town, into the long curving miles of the highway that led to the interstate that led toward home.

Ellie had missed her mother. Had missed cuddling her at night, their tee shirts touching, her mother's soft body curved around her for a story about when she was a little girl before sleep separated them. Ellie had missed her sitting hunched over her typewriter looking into her head for a word. Sometimes Ellie held her breath until the typewriter began to beat again. Ellie had secretly hated the typewriter and sometimes pounded the top when she was alone with it. Until she had been given a smaller desk next to her mother's with a painted wooden sign that said "Sssssssssh." Ten "s's." Was it still there?

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Soon the car slowed and her mother stopped watching the rear-view mirror. She began telling Ellie about the new family on the block who had a little girl, eight years old just like Ellie. Telling Ellie about her new book. "I'm not just typing," her mother said once when she read Ellie's five-sentence essay about her parents. "My mother tipes," the essay said.

"It's what I type that matters," her mother said.

"You type what you write," Ellie said.

"And you print what you write," her mother said.

"So what?"

Ellie closed her eyes and leaned her head back against her mother's shoulder. What was her father doing now? Was he missing her, coming out of the lawyer's office to the empty car, and her and the coloring book gone?

Ellie woke just as they were pulling into the driveway. It was night. A small light on the porch hurt her eyes. Somebody finally must have replaced the bulb. Ellie's mother wiped her damp cheek and gave her a long hug. Ellie squeezed her harder than she ever had before. Then her mother began dumping stuff on the seat. The "key-hunt" they called it. At least one a day.

Later as Ellie slept on the couch with her head in her mother's lap, her mother and Mrs. Conway from next door talked. They thought she was sleeping, Ellie knew.

"He didn't follow you?"

"No, anyway all I had to do was cross the state line back into Illinois. I have custody here. I keep forgetting that, after the horror of the last few months." She smoothed Ellie's hair as she talked. Her ring pulled, but not enough to hurt. "I feel like hell. Like a criminal," her mother said. "But I couldn't afford to go through the courts. 'Too much time and money,' my attorney said. And missing her all that time. 'You go get her, or I can get you someone,' he told me, 'but it's better if the parent goes along. Doesn't scare the kid as much.' So here we are back."

"Just get settled and it will seem like it never happened," Mrs. Conway said.

"But I had to do it," her mother said. "And anyway, he did it first."

She means *he* took me *first,* Ellie thought.

That was true. She kept her eyes closed as she remembered that day her father had picked her up for the weekend. It had been hot and he was wearing a short-sleeved shirt that stuck to him, no jacket. They had gone to the same hotel with the slide into the swimming pool and the pinball machines. Getting him up Saturday morning was always slow. First, he sat on the edge of the bed blowing smoke all over the room and rubbing his eyes. Asking "What's it doing outside?" Then he showered and shaved, farting a lot. She always used the bathroom before he got up. Finally, filled with pancakes and eggs, they went to the pool. He taught her how to turn somersaults—pushing off from the bottom at just the right time. Knowing when the time was right. Ellie's mother was afraid of water—learned to swim to graduate from college and forgot as soon as she passed. Ellie thought that was dumb.

Later they went to the zoo. The monkeys looked hot and cranky, too tired to play. Ellie's father kept looking for park benches. Ellie knew her father liked to sit a lot because Ellie's mother used to yell at him about it. Now the television was never on. Ellie missed it. The low buzz and glow from the family room. It had taken her a while to get used to the silence after school. Her mother always called "Ellie?" which helped. After the zoo, going back to the hotel, her father had told her he wanted her to live with him for a while. Started off just like that. His eyes hadn't moved from the street. He missed her terribly he said, and it wasn't fair that he was being deprived of her just because he was a man. "You're going to live with me for a while," he had said, "just like you lived with your mother." Live where, Ellie had thought, he usually just appeared in the car at the front of the house. She remembered crying because she was going to Molly's birthday party the next day. Her father never kept kleenex in the car like her mother did. Ellie had wiped her nose with her hand and then wiped her hand on the seat. He didn't see.

"You'll be able to see your mother," he had said. "Just as soon as the courts work things out."

"But my new dress for Molly's party. Mom just finished it. Can't we go back for my dress?" It was home on her bed all laid out for tomorrow, its plaid sash hanging down to the floor.

"We'll buy you all new clothes," he'd said. Ellie didn't think he had any idea of all the millions of things girls wear.

"I want to go home," she had said. Her hands were sticky from cotton candy and she had to go to the bathroom.

"I know, I know, but 'home' is going to be with me for a while."

They had driven through the night. Once stopping by the side of the road where Ellie squatted down. Again no kleenex. Once stopping for hamburgers and malts. Ellie ordered a big chocolate sundae that she couldn't finish. She hadn't looked at her father when she ordered it. The next day they bought shorts and halters that matched. And a canopy bed with a pink ruffle around the top that swayed in the breeze from her window. A jungle gym arrived two days later. Her father swore a lot when he worked, Ellie remembered. The neighborhood kids came around and watched. About laundry, "You're on your own," he told her. She learned to rummage in the still-dirty clothes for socks when she forgot to run the washer. Her father took her to his barber to have her hair "styled." "It's too short," she had said, "that's what it is."

Her mother called. Finally she and Ellie talked while her father listened in. "I'll see you soon," her mother said. Ellie could hardly speak past her crying and her father came in and hung up the phone. They ate hotdogs with ketchup, onions, mustard, relish. Hamburgers and T.V. dinners. His first girlfriend was "Barbara," the second "Jude," but he called them all "love" so when the third one came to visit, Ellie didn't bother to learn her name.

And now fall was here and she was back with her mother. Everything looked strange and new for the first five min-

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utes. The softness of the curtains, and tablecloths and pillows was comforting. Her desk was still in place. It had a new sign "Let's talk." Ellie liked the "sssssssss" better. She'd see Molly tomorrow, wear the new dress. She wondered if her father was angry. He would know she had opened the door because the window wasn't broken or anything. But she'd had to do it. She missed him too.

Two days later a man came to change the locks on the front and back doors. Her mother's friends touched her lightly as if she weren't quite real. They all heard the story of the trip back home. Angry voices puffed smoke. "The bastard," Ellie heard before her mother told her to go watch T.V. for a while. Her mother's friends were a bore, all that talk.

Ellie's mother walked her and Molly to school. Holding hands with them, skipping part way. Ellie wore her new skirt. They looked for Mrs. Logan's room. Mrs. Logan squeezed her and later chose her to write the date and quotation on the blackboard. It had taken her a while to print: *September 10, 1980 Nothing in life is to be feared. It is to be understood." Marie Curie.* She stood back while Mrs. Logan explained it and told some story about Marie Curie. Ellie turned back and forth so her skirt swished against her legs. Molly wanted one like it, she could tell.

Ellie knew her mother had talked with the principal. Miss Woodson was to call the police if anyone came for Ellie. Even her father. It had to stop.

Ellie liked walking back and forth to school with her mother. Once her mother said, "I think it's O.K., Ellie," but Ellie had insisted she get her shoes on and go along. "You have to," she said, making the hole in the screen door larger.

Ellie's hair was "growing in," her mother said. She still hunted for words—more often now, and for money. Looking out past her typewriter. Sometimes her mother had dates and Ellie had a babysitter. They wore suits that looked alike and always asked Ellie the same questions. She did it back. "How many kids do you have? Where are they?" Some did, some didn't. Only one came now and stayed over sometimes. He wore jeans and a plaid shirt sometimes, sometimes no shoes. His toothbrush was red and hung next to her mother's. Ellie used it to scrub her nails. She always put it back where she found it. Sometimes he played monopoly with her on Sunday while he watched football and her mother was cooking things that took too much time and didn't taste worth it. She'd slam the dice in front of him to get his attention. He'd jump but he never said anything. His name was Jack something.

She missed her father sometimes. She was allowed to talk to him now. He told her he would see her soon. It was complicated, he said. She hoped nobody like Barbara or Jude was sleeping in her canopy bed.

Field trips weren't really much fun. Just get teachers out of teaching. The bus ride was always too long, and the driver made them stop singing at the twentieth verse of "Another Bottle of Beer on the Wall." Allison, whose name was near Ellie's in the alphabet, usually spit up so that was an extra stop—if they made it in time.

The museum trip wasn't any different. Allison barfed two seats away. Ellie giggled and held her nose high in the air. Windows crashed open. The driver would clean it up while they were gone. They were each given a pamphlet for a game called "I spy." You had to look at a detail, like a dog's face, and then find it in a painting. Afterwards, Mrs. Logan lined them up by twos like babies and went to find the bus. Ellie and Molly held hands. A fight began in the back of the line and Ellie stepped out to see just as a pretty woman with red bushy hair came over and said, "Ellie?"

Ellie said, "Yes," and it seemed to be enough because suddenly behind the woman was a tall man who bent down and scooped Ellie up. Her chest collapsed and he pulled her against him. She tried to scream but no air came. "Ellie," Molly's cry followed her and she kicked her legs out but he was holding her too tight. Something was tearing open, cold air on her shoulder. He carried her down the steps two at a time, past the stone lions, carried her fast, making it difficult for the red-haired woman to keep up, telling Ellie that her father was waiting for her at the corner in the blue car over there and he wanted to see her very badly. The man's eyes were red and he was panting like a dog into Ellie's face. "Put me down." She arched her back but it didn't work. "Hey, little girl," the man said, "In one minute now, O.K.?"

"No," Ellie knew that somehow her father didn't want to just *see* her, like she wanted to just *see* him. And then they were in front of a car and her father was opening the door to the back seat. The man bent over and pushed her in. Her father held out his arms and they did feel good and big and he said "Ellie, Ellie, Ellie," and then something about "your first ride in a little airplane, just like you always wanted." What did he know? The woman called "Goodbye, Ellie," she seemed about to say something more but turned away. The woman's voice, not like her mother's at all, made her cry harder. No kleenex, just her father's rough suit, but she didn't care.

The airport was too small. They drove right up to the toy plane and the pilot led them up the steep steps saying as soon as they got off the ground he would let her fly the plane. Had she ever flown a plane before? His teeth glistened. The dumb shit, Ellie thought. She could hear her father say just that.

But he told her he had a new sales job and that's where they were going. Her canopy bed was already there with a new pink quilt. All girls like pink.

"It sucks," Ellie said. "Sucks" was new at school, it was the first time Ellie said it. It didn't make her feel better.

"Forget that talk," her father said patting her knee.

"Where we going?" she asked, but he couldn't tell her right now. A new place.

"Will we be there long?" she asked.

"We're going to live there. You know—cook and sleep there."

"And watch T.V."

"Quit talking like your mother."

"I like T.V.," Ellie said, her eyes filling again. "How long are we going to live there? When will I see Mom?"

"Oh, Ellie, Ellie." He put his arm around her. "Not

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right away. I'm sorry it has to be that way—but the same thing would happen just like before. It has to end sometime."

The plane made Ellie sick, lurching into slides she felt inside her stomach. She didn't want to fly. Would she barf like Allison, make the pilot mad? She felt wet all over. Her father talked on about the new school, the teacher expecting her. Ellie wondered if the teacher knew she had a mother.

The teacher called her "Ellen." "Ellen, stop day-dreaming," and Ellie tried. This school was smaller, just like her father said. The whole town seemed a smaller version of where she lived with her mother, except people were outside their houses more, planting things, chopping wood, cutting hair. She missed her mother, and this missing brought an ache that made it hard to eat. She hadn't seen or talked with her since the museum. She was sure her mother was still alive. Only grandmothers die. Her father said of course she'd see her mother again. But she didn't think she would see her mother here. Strange how the words "daddy" and "mom" had become "your father" and "your mother." They seemed to accuse her of something. "Your mother" was far away, she knew. At least three plane-hours away. When she thought about her mother she sometimes held her breath. She didn't know what to do.

She began to forget what clothes she had. Her father never separated the dirty laundry into piles and so her blouses grew gray and limp. One turned pink—at least she couldn't remember *buying* a pink blouse. She learned to throw a baseball. They took bike rides along roads with trucks that seemed to pull at her hair as they passed. She ate breakfast alone trying to forget her dreams, but her throat was always sore. She woke screaming one night when she fell down three steps to the landing in the middle of the stairs. At home, at her mother's house, the bathroom was *that way* down the hall. She lay there until she realized where she was. Until her father told her, lifting her, "You must have been sleepwalking," as he tucked her into bed. Ellie felt such tightness in her chest that she couldn't feel the bed under her. Or the blanket above. Her teacher asked about the bruise and her explanation sounded silly.

She knew now where she lived because it was on signs in town and the grocery store was called "Granada's Largest Market for Fit Produce." Where do they sell maps she wondered. Wyoming?

Her father had more loves who probably had names. They smelled good and sometimes brought overnight bags with fun compartments. The latest cooked special breakfasts of very very mushy eggs and crisp bacon. She put green things in the eggs and turned their orange juice pink with something from her father's liquor cabinet. She played cards with Ellie and fixed her hair as they all sat in front of the T.V. glow.

Ellie's father became President of the P.T.A. "Men are usually just treasurers," her teacher said, "You should be proud."

After three months Ellie was allowed to walk home alone from school. Oh, not really alone, because her friend Juanita joined up with her after the fourth block going and up to the fourth block coming home. Home? One of them, anyway.

The car was on its third time around the block. She hadn't noticed it the first two times until the third and then she realized all three. Did that make sense?

The car was going slower. She looked over at the driver. He was a man she didn't know. But she didn't know everyone in town yet. She put her lunch box down by a lamp post, and then she kept on walking.

The car, it was green, not too new, speeded up to be a little ahead of her, then stopped. She kept on walking.

"Hello, little girl," he said. He raised his eyebrows; instead of smiling, she thought.

She was surprised he didn't know her name. She stopped.

"You don't know my name?"

"Uh, no," he said. His hair was shorter than her father's hair. It looked molded to his head like a puppet's hair. "Do you want me to guess your name?" He asked softly as if there were someone else around to hear.

"No," Ellie said.

"You know," he said, "I just saw an ice cream store back a couple blocks and I bet you like ice cream." He didn't seem to be asking her anything so she didn't reply. She looked back at her lunch box sitting by the lamp post.

"Why don't you come with me and we'll go get an ice cream cone. I'll let you have double scoops."

"You don't know my father, do you?" she said.

He hesitated and adjusted his mirror.

"Or my mother?" she said. "Do you know them?"

"No," he said shaking his head, "I don't believe I've met them."

A car came by and he watched it pass without speaking.

Ellie watched him. He turned back to her, his eyebrows pulling up a smile this time.

"Can I have a triple scoop?" she asked. Did her father mind her having ice cream before dinner? She couldn't remember for sure. Maybe it was her mother?

"Sure," he said. "Sure."

She walked around the front of the car and opened the door herself. Then she got in and closed the door. Herself. The radio was playing something fast and loud. He must have turned it on while she was walking around the car. She hadn't heard the radio before. She sat back as the car pulled away from the curb. She folded her hands in her lap.

"I thought we'd take a ride first," he said. He lit a cigarette. It smelled sweet.

Ellie closed her eyes and breathed deep. She felt the car speed up on its ride away from town. She wanted to go back but she didn't know where. Now, in another car, she floated back past the words, past her mother's face and her father's face, past their crying and holding her too tight. Past the terrible missing them. Because now, just as they had both said, it just simply had to end. Sometime it had to end. □

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DONALD JUSTICE

LITTLE ELEGY FOR CELLO AND PIANO

It was early December, still warm. Damp leaves were packed thickly against the curbs that afternoon as we walked; others had stuck to the sidewalks or left their imprint there, a season's decalcomania.

Being early, we had time for a sort of tea at an outdoor cafe. It was just warm enough to sit outdoors under the canopy without discomfort, the last Sunday of the year perhaps when that would still be so. Looking back now, I see that there must have been something of the poignancy of last occasions in the air, even though we were not much aware of it at the time. I remember the barely legible script of the oversized menus and the cheerful waitresses darting and hovering about in their starchy sky-blue smocks. From time to time laughter arose from the tables around us.

There was a moment when Eugene folded his spindly pianist's fingers around my sister Florence's chubby pink hand on the checkered tablecloth and smiled. When Eugene smiled broadly like that it always seemed to me that his domed bald head took on a slight glow as from some inner illumination. He and my sister had been married for more than thirty years, and it was clear that they had weathered out whatever storms had come their way. The waitress, bringing our hot cocoa and small cakes, took in the situation at a glance and beamed with an air of almost parental approval.

What we found to talk about I have forgotten. Someone unseen walked past on the sidewalk, whistling a jagged little up-to-date tune none of us could identify. It amused us, not knowing. There was the aroma of Eugene's after-tea cigar suspended among us, blending with the smell of dregs and cake crumbs, of scrubbed bodies and clean clothes. And the December sunshine continued to pour down. Overhead, beyond the canopy, the sky was cloudless.

We may have lingered, or perhaps the cheerful service was slow. We had to hurry, after all, through streets strangely empty. We passed a few of the lesser embassies, where little knots of people—journalists, we supposed—stood about waiting for someone to arrive or to depart. Perhaps it was a day on which something important was expected, but if so I have forgotten what it might have been. At one of the embassies—Washington is not a city I know very well—a limousine did turn up the semi-circular drive just as we reached the corner, and we stood for a moment watching while several dark-costumed mysterious bodies were disgorged and swept indoors before any harm could be done to them. It was one of those small but definite events, of no significance or consequence, which nevertheless seem set in quotation marks.

By the time we had mounted the steps to the Phillips Collection, the foyer seemed crowded. Small groups were just beginning to drift towards the gallery where the chairs were set out for the afternoon's recital. Florence disappeared almost at once into the back room where her cello waited. Although one of his pieces was on the program that afternoon, Eugene was not widely enough known to be much recognized. All the same, as we edged past the music stand and the open grand, two or three glances were cast in his direction. Eugene was oblivious to that, as usual. The Steinway gleamed. I imagined all the notes of the afternoon lurking down there among its strings already, waiting to be released, Eugene's among them. Eugene paused beside the open piano, I noticed, looking down as if to ponder his own reflection in the polished black.

We found seats, among the last untaken. They were in the corner next to the immense Bonnard, "La Grande Terasse." The painted couple in the bright foreground struck me at once as a couple much like Florence and Eugene, now translated improbably into a sort of paradise made up all of flowers and light. One reason I had never passed much beyond the amateur stage myself as a musician was an undiscourageable tendency on my part to drift off, while listening, on the clouds of some fantasy or other, as if the music were nothing more than an accompaniment to my all too cinematic visions. Except when actually playing, I could never attend to music as music for very long at a time, though I had always loved it. And that afternoon, in spite of my good intentions, it was clear that the Bonnard would be an added temptation to drift.

I duly noted Florence, changed now into long dark skirt, as she entered and executed her neat bow, along with the pianist, a tiny man with several large rings on his fingers, also bowing and smiling. Beyond, at the other end of the room, the weakening sunlight filtered in through the narrow screens onto the bronze peacock and the slender reaching limbs of a potted plant on a table.

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But with the first notes of the Dvorak with which the performance was launched I was already wandering off down the terrace at my shoulder towards the sea and a sky flocked with gold and lavender clouds.

The first thing I really registered was the half-moment of silence when the Dvorak was done. I applauded with the rest. And now I noticed a singular stillness descending on Eugene. His "Little Elegy for Cello and Piano" was next on the program. I was able to see, before I returned to Bonnard's terrace—or part of the way there, for I resisted conscientiously—how perfectly one could be tuned to listen. Eugene had become a listener. He was like some instrument made for that purpose—like a rain-gauge, to catch rainwater. I could see his shoulders hunching, his breath drawing in. It is one of the ways I like to picture him. Then the piano began its little storm and almost as suddenly grew still. Florence's bow drew out a long note in the middle range and held it; and then, as she and the bejeweled pianist began their mournful dialogue, I saw Eugene's very jowls slacken with pleasure and contentment.

The piece was a sort of fantasia in one long movement. By *long* I mean ten or twelve minutes at most. But I had in fact lost track of time. There was a perfect consonance—for me, there was—between the Bonnard and Eugene's music. I thought I could read also on the faces of those nearest me a sheen of attention that went beyond politeness or curiosity. And I sensed or imagined in Eugene himself a fulfillment which must come very rarely indeed. Florence was bent close to her instrument, drawing from it the rich, exact sounds the composer had conceived, but now they took on an existence apart from him. They had momentarily a life in and of themselves, beyond us all.

At some point during the performance Eugene sneezed. There had been the usual muffled coughs and rustlings and shiftings all along, but the ear adjusts to familiar disruptions without difficulty. This sneeze of his was somehow different. It succeeded in obliterating one rapid little staircase of notes. It was like a small rip in a garment, and I felt the loss even then, sharply and immediately.

The last sounds rescued me from the terrace—a succession of three plucked chords on the cello, quickly fading. Florence's familiar head with its bands of gray-piled hair remained bowed briefly over her cello, and she did not look up in our direction. Probably Eugene had asked her not to. For when heads began to swivel around in search of the composer, and a few swung our way, Eugene remained seated. He preferred the shadows, as it were.

During intermission a number of his and Florence's musical friends from the area came over and there was much pumping of hands. "Wonderful piece!" one friend exclaimed, and others joined in the praise.

I myself have always considered the "Little Elegy for Cello and Piano" Eugene Bestor's masterpiece. Ten or twelve minutes of music, no more, but hardly to be improved upon—a sad and bitter jewel.

And yet it has not been heard since. Eugene died late that spring. Other works of the Bestor canon occasionally are heard, compositions longer established, but after the death of an artist one of two things generally happens. Either there is a rebirth of interest in his work, or else all interest wanes and withers quickly. The latter is by far the more common case, and so it has been with Eugene's music, however much respected it had once been.

There was a memorial recital, but Florence was not in the mood to attempt the "Little Elegy" again so soon. She may have considered the piece too close in spirit to the occasion. She wanted bright pieces only, and it was her choice. Then, too, she may have wondered a little, as I did at the time, whether Eugene had had some early hint or premonition of his death to come, whether he might not have written the piece, in a sense, for himself. This, understandably, she would not have wanted to deal with for a while.

Two or three years later I learned from a program Florence mailed me that the "Little Elegy" was to be done at a college in Vermont near which the Bestors had lived. She knew my high opinion of the work. It was included on her initiative, I am sure, for she was the featured performer of the evening. But as luck would have it, she fell ill a day or two before the performance and the program had to be canceled at the last minute. Apparently it was a hard-luck piece, a jinx perhaps, as certain plays are said to be. Florence herself, I know, never again played it in public, and now she is gone also.

The Bestor manuscripts have come down to me. One day, I suppose, the library of the college in Vermont will have them. I used to take out the manuscript of Eugene's final composition now and then and let my eye run over the spidery calligraphy of the notes. The small black notes climbed the staves slowly or floated above the top line like miniature storm-clouds, dissolving and breaking up eventually into quickly scattering bird-flocks. There was a visual drama to all this, and I had enough training to hear faintly the skeletal sounds behind the notes. But the music was a little beyond my practical skills. I could pick out the notes of the piano part at my own pace and work up the difficult passages, but it was not the same as performing it. In any case, there was not a cellist—none I had heard of anyhow—in the entire sprawling range and extent of the sun-and-sand community I had retired to recently. Perhaps there would have been one in the nearest junior college, but that was miles and miles away, back across the causeway.

There comes a time of day now when I sit back and listen to the surf. It is too far away to be seen but I can hear it. The sun is just easing its way down, scattering color. There is a terrace of my own out there, bricks, with potted palm-tree and potted orange-tree. I can hear the music better where I sit than at the keyboard. And I wonder how many others who were present in the Phillips that afternoon—an occasion neither heroic nor historic—can still summon up any of the by now broken web of sounds produced then, as I am able to do, though of course only partially and just barely. The last three plucked chords—surely the sound of them hangs on, consciously or not, in the memory of a few others, though fading.

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There is one phrase of the cello's—an early phrase, before the sounds had become mixed up in my mind with Bonnard's colors—which holds fast for me, a little upwards rush and subsiding of notes that has come to represent some nameless feeling which otherwise has no voice or expression. This is the way it is written out in the manuscript:

A brief inhaling and exhaling, a somewhat drawn-out deep gasp or sigh. Sometimes this phrase comes to me just as I am falling asleep. It is not exactly that I hear it. It is just there, and I do not of course know what it means.

It is sentimental of me to think of Eugene as surviving through this fragment, which in any case I am probably the only person anywhere to remember. And yet it does seem as if all the hard early years of study and practice here and abroad, the thousands of mornings of seclusion in his studio, the remarkable ear, the near-photographic memory and recall, had all come down to this, this one ghostly phrase. And soon there will be no one at all to remember how even these six notes sounded. □

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Poems by David Wojahn, Bink Noll, David Towner, Sandra Alcosser

Essays by Kenneth Lash, Marilyn Krysl, David Groff, & Scott Russell Sanders

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Studies of the Heart

I was lying in bed, nearly asleep, just twenty minutes ago, when I heard my father's footsteps coming up to the attic. I lay there, waiting to see if he was just going to pick up something from his desk—my room, where I moved last January, right after I turned eleven, used to be his study, and he still has all his cardiology books here, and piles of medical journals and newspaper clippings, and a door laid across two metal cabinets, and an old wooden desk, and some big blocks of lucite with hearts, real *human* hearts, imbedded in them, and a dusty brown medical bag and a brass microscope, and dozens of rubber-banded loops of EKG tapes—and sometimes he comes upstairs late at night to work; and I'll wake up at two or three in the morning and see him sitting way at the other end of my room, hunched over, reading EKGs, or writing on a yellow pad. When I wake up, sometimes he just says hello and tells me to go back to sleep; other times he comes over and sits on my bed and shows me the EKGs, and how you can tell a bundle-branch block from ventricular hypertrophy from an acute MI. And sometimes he tells me stories about being in World War II, fighting the Nazis, liberating the concentration camps.

Tonight when he came up, he said, like always:

"Are you awake?"

"No." I said. "I'm asleep and this is a dream."

"Such a joker," he said. "You want I should *patch* your *tuchus*?" He sat on the edge of my bed. "What are you doing tomorrow?"

"Nothing," I said. School is out.

"Would you like to come to the hospital?"

"What for?"

"To see a sick patient," he said. "There's an old Negro lady, who used to be a maid. She had an acute myocardial infarction two months ago and now has congestive failure."

"And?"

"So she has an arrhythmia. She can't breathe. The Cardiology Fellow called up—he doesn't know what to do."

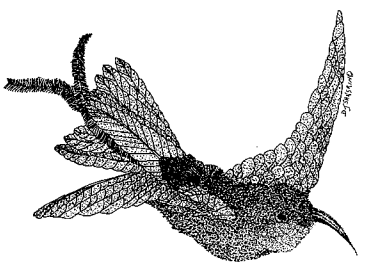
"Give Digitalis," I said.

"Very smart," he said. "Are you coming or not? If you're coming, get dressed."

So here I am at the hospital with him, on the cardiac unit, while everybody else is home asleep—Mom and Kathy and Jonny and Danny and Susie and little baby Beth and our dog Frisky.

"This is my eldest son," says my father to Mrs. Stefanik, the nurse, a big, red-faced lady who is standing behind the polished wood counter of the nurses' station.

"Nice to meet you," says Mrs. Stefanik. "Are you going to be a famous doctor like your father?"



"Maybe," I say. "Or a baseball player."

Mrs. Stefanik laughs. She offers me a chocolate from a large box. I take one, and chew slowly. My father is reading the chart.

Two young doctors in white coats and white pants come over and start talking to my father.

"Oh hello," one of them says, looking at the white coat I'm wearing, its sleeves rolled up, hem dragging on the floor. "Are you going to be a famous doctor like your father?"

"Looks like he's already started," says the other one.

"He's considering a career in professional sports," my father says.

The two young doctors laugh for only a second, then continue talking in low voices about the patient.

"Have a seat," my father tells me. He leads me to a little alcove to the side of the nurses' station. "Mrs. Stefanik, can you find something for my son to read?"

Mrs. Stefanik brings me some magazines, and the box of chocolates, this time insisting that I take two. My father and the two doctors walk down the hall, disappearing.

I wait. I read and read the magazines. I squirm in the chair. My mouth is dry and sweet from the candy. From where I am sitting I can see the ghostly shapes of some beds in the room across the hall, and what I imagine are lumpy blue bodies on them.

Mrs. Stefanik talks on the phone for awhile, then goes down the hall, and is gone.

I wait. I am used to waiting, because when there are six kids you always have to wait your turn. But not at this hour of night. Usually when I come here with Dad, he takes me into the patient's room with him, and if it is a nice patient, who doesn't mind, he lifts me up on the bed, and I hold the stethoscope to my ears and listen to the patient's heart sounds: ka-thunk, ka-thunk, ka-thunk, sometimes with a *thunk-thunk* thrown in if there's an arrhythmia: ka-thunk, ka-thunk, *thunk-thunk*, ka-thunk, ka-thunk. And the patient will shake my hand and ask if I'm going to be a famous doctor like my father, and isn't it good that I'm getting such an early start?

It is two-oh-seven in the morning. I have never been up so late at night, except once when Jonny and I stayed up all night to see when it gets light. I am so bored.

Finally they come back: Dad and the two young doctors. They talk in low voices for a moment, then the two young doctors shake my hand with their moist hands, and Dad says, "So? Time for home?"

We drop the white coats off in his laboratory, then run down six flights—elevators coddle the heart, Dad says—to the front entrance, where the big blue Plymouth is sitting alone, in the Doctors' Lot.

At home, we make a snack of cold meatloaf sandwiches on rye with Durkee Sauce and American cheese and pour tall glasses of ice water, and cut a kosher pickle in slices, and my father spreads out, across the breakfast table, between us, the narrow long tape of an EKG.

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A black line wavers along the gridded paper. It rises and falls, occasionally twitching up or down.

"Here it is," he says.

"What?" The pattern before me is confusing, new.

"Fresh off the EKG machine. A very sick patient. See, here the heart stopped . . ."

"It stopped?"

"For nearly a minute. And here it starts beating again, after we gave her a shot of . . ."

I look at my father in surprise: it's the woman we just saw.

"Is she going to live?" I say.

"Tonight she almost died."

"But is she going to *live*?" I look for clues in the gridded tape.

"This may be her last night," he says.

I finish my sandwich, there in the yellow-painted breakfast room, looking out the dark windows at the ghostly trunk of the apple tree outside, and beyond it, across the lawn, at the picket fence that separates our lawn from the Rineharts', and beyond that, at the dark bulk of what, in the daytime, must just be houses, walls, porches, garages, but which now seems to pulse with life.

"Bedtime," my father says.

I stand.

"Clean off your place," he says. "Don't leave a mess for your mother."

2.

It is a beautiful Saturday morning, perfect for driving in the country—cool, still misty under the trees, and there aren't many cars out yet, just some pickup trucks full of pumpkins and corn and logs that whiz by us. We are in the white Corvair, heading East, past Richmond and Chagrin and County Line Road. My little brother and I are sitting in the front seat next to Dad, and in the back seat are the metal boxes with his research equipment.

We swerve suddenly out across the yellow line, to pass a black carriage being pulled by a horse. My brother goes wild: What's that? What's that? he asks.

"It's just the Amish," I say.

We go up and down little hills. My brother says he is carsick.

"Just take deep breaths," I say. "Anyway, we're almost there."

We are in farm country now: corn, cows, barns, parachutes.

"I see one!"

"Where?" says my brother.

"*There!*"

"Where?" I don't see."

"It's red and white. See, it's falling down."

"Hold still," our father says. We turn onto a dirt road, bumping along it, then we turn across the field, dodging a big hole which is filled with rocks and rusty metal, and drive like crazy, raising dust, to the very edge of the woods, where there are a dozen cars parked around a big old green schoolbus.

"Where's the plane?" I say. I bump my chin on the dashboard, looking. I see the plane. I open the door, run out looking in the air. A second, a third, a fourth parachute have appeared. The red and white parachute is coming down to the ground, a man hanging below: he angles down to the ground, does a quick somersault as he hits, and comes up on his feet, red and white nylon billowing around him.

"It's Will," my father says. We run with him over to the parachute. Will is a tall, thin man wearing an orange jumpsuit. He balls up the parachute material in his arms to stop it from catching the wind. He is standing, I see as we approach, in the middle of a white circle, drawn with chalk. There is another, larger circle which we are standing inside.

"They're coming down," says my brother. He's scared.

"Dad, we have to move," I say.

Dad is talking to Will about the research study: today he wants to go up in the plane.

The other parachutes swirl above up in the blue sky, one red and yellow, the other two green and white, they are swirling around, coming down on us. Dad yells at us to get over to the car.

We run to the side of the field, by the old schoolbus. Our father is still in the middle of the circle with Will.

"He's going to get hit," my brother says. But the wind has blown the parachutists to the edge of the field, over by the road.

"Look at that. That one almost got run over," I tell my brother.

Today I am in a mood to scare him.

"If the wind blows the wrong way you can get killed," I say.

"No you can't," my brother says.

"Oh yeah?" I turn him around, and point out what is in the trees.

"That's nothing. That's just a kite."

"That's a parachute," I say. "See, it's red and blue. Last week the wind blew the wrong way and somebody came down right there."

"Was he all right?"

"No, he died. He was torn into little pieces."

We walk over, around the bus, to where a big machine sits on the ground, throbbing.

"That's a generator," I tell my brother. "It makes electricity."

"What do you make it out of?" my brother says. "Did he *really* die?"

The plane is coming down lower, low over the barn and farmhouse, so it looks like it will crash into them, then it glides down onto the field, bumping over the furrows, and finally comes to a stop near the chalk circles.

I reach into the back seat of the Corvair for one of the metal boxes.

"Sometimes the plane crashes too," I say.

He's hanging on every word I say, but I can tell he doesn't believe me. The metal box bangs against my side as we walk across the field toward the plane; the door on the side of the plane is open, and some men with parachutes on their backs are going inside. Our father is leaning on the wing.

"See that hole in the ground?" I say.

"Where?" says my brother.

"Over there. You know what happened last week?"

"What?"

"One of the parachutes got caught in the propeller and the plane came crashing down on the ground."

"No, it didn't?" my brother says, but there is a question in his voice.

"Yes, it did." I hand my father the metal box: he takes out a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff, and looks inside at the syringes and

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test tubes and bottles of alcohol and the cotton balls, to make sure everything is there.

"Watch out for your brother," he says. He gets in the plane.

"Okay," I say.

The men pull the door closed.

"It did not," my brother says.

We back away.

"Oh yeah?" I say. "Why else is there that hole in the ground?"

The plane takes off, bumping across the field. I hold my brother's hand. We wait for our father to come down.

3.

Sometimes my father comes up to the attic and tells stories. He tells the story of how his mother's brother was kicked in the stomach by some hoods, criminals, in Poland, and how something burst inside and he died. He tells of Dillonvale, Ohio, where his mother and father settled after they left Poland, and where his father opened up a store with his partner: *Hellerstein and Finkelstein, Outfitters from Head to Foot;* he tells what it was like when the coalminers went out on strike, and scabs were sent down from Chicago, carrying guns; he tells about the swinging bridge over the creek which he was afraid he'd fall off every time he crossed it; he tells how he was the smallest boy in the class; he tells how his family moved to Cleveland during the Depression; he tells about medical school and joining the Army, and the War. Those are the best stories, the War stories.

When my friend Ronny comes over to spend the night, we always ask my father to tell War stories. He tells us how two of his jeep drivers were killed right next to him. He tells how he was wounded. He tells how he pulled men out of burning tanks. He tells how they liberated the concentration camps and found thousands of starving people. He tells how he was captured by the Russians outside Berlin, in the closing days of the War, and was mistaken for a Germany spy. Really? we say. Is that really true? We lie awake late at night, talking about guns and tanks and bombers, and what we'd do if the Nazis came and tried to take us away.

And in the afternoons, when I get tired of reading, sitting in my orange reclining chair at the end of my room, near the window, I'll set down my *Superman* comic or *Tom Swift* book, and begin looking through my father's things. In the closet are large, crackly bags full of old Army clothes, green wool coats and khaki jackets with silver and gold bars still attached to their shoulders, and dusty old army boots, and three bayonets in sheaths and a bulky white sheepskin coat, fleece turned in, which my father took from a German prisoner, and piles of German books, and a framed steel relief of a half-naked woman raising her arm before a crowd of soldiers, with a banner fluttering overhead that reads *Deutschland Uber Alles:* my father broke off her arm when he took it from a German house, and now the arm dangles from its shoulder by a chain. One day, looking in the back drawers of his wooden desk, I find a canvas bag inside which are letters, small trophies and medals, photographs—tiny photographs showing piles of bodies at a concentration camp: starved, dead.

I read and reread comics from the pile beside my chair; especially my hero, *Superman*. My father reads my comics too. Three or four at a time, he takes them downstairs and reads them at the breakfast table.

"I want to keep up with what you're reading," he says.

One night my father comes up to my room when I am sleeping.

"Are you awake?" he says.

"What?" I say drowsily.

"No lights," he says. I lie back. "Listen," he says. "This is no joke. The world is about to be destroyed."

"When?" I say at last.

"Tonight," he says. He tells me to listen carefully. I shouldn't be scared. He has a plan.

I sit up, leaning forward as he talks.

It's absurd, his plan, but as he tells it to me I find myself wanting to believe it, somehow hoping that it could just be true. What he says is that there is a rocket in the basement, which he has been building ever since he found out that the world was going to be destroyed, a rocket that is just big enough for one person. What he wants me to do is to go downstairs with him. It's time for me to go.

I get out of bed, and put on my slippers and follow him down the creaky stairs to the second floor, where everyone is sleeping. We go from room to room, from Jonny to Danny to Kathy to Susie to Beth, and in each room I whisper goodbye; and then, excited, terrified, clinging to the bannister in the darkness, I follow him downstairs to the first floor.

"Shh," he says.

We stand in the hallway, in the darkness, before the dimly glowing panels of the front door. He leads me into the living room, and stops abruptly; there we wait, between the dim white outline of the couch and the back windows, which are half-shrouded with curtains, and through which I can see the back yard, the apple tree, and beyond it, the rose trellises and the brick wall; all of this, I realize with a thrill, is about to be destroyed. I wonder what the rocket looks like, and how comfortable it will be, and how long I'll be in space before I land on a new planet, and what that wonderful new world will be like, and exactly what superpowers I'll have.

"Okay," my father says at last. "That's that."

"What?" I say.

"It won't be tonight," he says.

"What won't?"

"The world won't be destroyed after all."

"Oh," I say, disappointed beyond all words. "What about the rocket?"

"Another time," he says. He begins walking out of the living room, toward the hallway. Eventually, I follow him back upstairs.

4.

The first day of cardiovascular surgery rotation, I show up in the ICU at 5:00 a.m. The ICU is an enormous crevasse of linoleum and glass, sealed off from the rest of the hospital; the nurses' station is in the middle and patient rooms are on the perimeter, behind sliding glass doors. It's cold. It feels like there's a wind blowing constantly, starting from the floor and going up through the ceiling. Shivering, I sit in the nurses' station, drinking coffee, until the rest of the team shows up at quarter of six.

Raklov is the Chief Resident; a thin, exhausted-looking man in rumpled greens and a white coat that looks like it's been slept in for weeks. He introduces me to the interns and residents on the team, and we begin Rounds. We go through sliding doors into the chilly, windy patient rooms. The patients have tubes coming out of their chests, connected to suction machines in the wall. Some of them are on respirators. A few have odd, sleek machines at the foot of their beds, machines that thump every few

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seconds. Intra-aortic balloon pumps, one of the interns tells me. The cold air is from a laminar flow exhaust system, like you have in a chemistry lab.

We go off the Unit to the ward, where the patients go when they are stable. We round, looking at chest wounds, removing and replacing gauze pads, seeing how the long gash from the base of the neck to the solar plexus is healing, whether there is pain or swelling, whether suture material is showing through. The patients complain of pain, but they look happy, relieved, and they're up, sitting on the edge of their beds or taking a few steps in the hall.

Our team has two cases today, Raklov says.

We go into the locker room and change into greens, and put on masks and caps and shoe covers, and push through into the surgery suite. We stand before scrub sinks, washing our hands and arms up above the elbows with plastic pads full of yellow soap, we scrub our hands with the soft bristles on one side of the pad, we rinse our arms and turn off the water with foot-pedals, and we back into the operating room, water dripping off our arms. We dry our arms with sterile towels, and the nurses hold gowns up for us so we can slide into them, arms first, and they tie them around us, and they slide long plastic gloves over our hands.

We turn to the table. The patient is already out, and the anesthesiologist is securing the tube in his throat. Raklov motions to me to get out of the way so he and Berg, the intern, can put cloth drapes over the patient's body, keeping his chest and left leg exposed, and then unfold a paper drape with a 'window' in it over his chest. The Attending, Dr. Wharton, has come in and gowned up.

We stand at the table. The nurse adjusts a tray of instruments over the foot of the bed. Raklov stands over the patient's bare leg.

"Scalpel," says Dr. Wharton.

Wharton feels for landmarks on the chest. He begins to cut—a smooth slice opening up the skin from the V at the base of the neck to the tail of the xyphoid, the lower end of the sternum. Raklov blots blood away with gauze pads, and bovies one or two blood vessels that are still bleeding.

"Saw," says Dr. Wharton.

The nurse hands over something that looks like a high-tech version of a Black & Decker tool. Dr. Wharton

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slides the tip of it under the upper edge of the patient's sternum, and begins cutting downward, until he reaches the end of the incision. Then there is something for me to do: to hold the side of the chest back with a retractor, so Dr. Wharton and Dr. Raklov can go through the pericardium.

And there is the heart. Beating against the retractor, bulging up every second or two, red as a newborn baby's head, shrinking back down inside. Dr. Wharton lifts, clamps, slices, sticks a tube in an open vessel, sutures, cuts, tells Raklov to move in. Raklov holds, clamps, cuts, suctions, then holds a tube in his hand. I watch, thinking of the day my father called three years ago, after his heart surgery, how I was sitting in my dorm room that day and the phone rang and he said, Are you there? and I said yes and he said, Listen carefully, I'm in the hospital, I've had surgery, and then went on to describe in great, woozy detail—his voice fading every minute or two—how the pain had come on in his office, how he knew what it was, and called the surgery suite, and said to them, I have a patient to schedule for a coronary bypass, and they said who is the patient and he said, it is me; and how weird that seemed to me at the time, hearing about it a week afterwards, and how I thought at that time, Do I really want to be a doctor? And how there was suddenly an interruption and somebody said that was enough, and then he said he had to go, and that his chest hurt, not his heart, I was to understand, but the incision, which pain, though nonlethal, was nevertheless more than he could take, and how ashamed I felt for being absolutely furious at him, which I knew I just shouldn't be.

"Hold this," Raklov says, pushing in my direction a plastic tube that extends down through the aorta, into the heart. I reach for the tube, around Dr. Wharton's hand and Raklov's hand, and Raklov lets go of the tube, and then the tube is drifting upward, out of both of our hands. We both grab for it: Raklov gets it first, and holds it before me.

"You *got* it?" he says.

"Got it," I say.

"Let me see that for a second," Dr. Wharton says. "Did I see an air bubble go in there?" He clamps the tube near the aorta, and taps the side of it with a probe. "I should have told you to hold it down," he says.

We do two more bypasses that day, and two more the next, and then a valve replacement, and an experimental balloon dilation procedure; I really love cardiac surgery, I find, and Dr. Wharton and Dr. Raklov let me do more of the cutting and suturing, and even some blunt dissection in the chest. I'm one of the best medical students they've ever had on the service, Berg says. I consider a career in surgery. Would I like it, getting up at five every morning, coming home at midnight, having the unequaled privilege of cutting the human heart?

One day, while we're on Rounds, a middle-aged woman comes up to us, hysterical.

"I brought a whole man in here," she says. "Now look what I have: half a man!"

She points at her husband, who is lying in bed; he had a stroke during the operation, and is paralyzed on one side. That happens sometimes. One of the nurses has to go over to her, and calm her down. We continue on Rounds. It's not until that night, when I'm on my way out of the Med Center, that the thought strikes me that it might have been my fault. I go back along the long corridors to the ward, and, backpack over my shoulder, I lean over the chart rack, looking for the right chart, the chart of the half-man. I look around; is anyone watching me, here at eight at night in the nurses' station?

Was it me? I leaf through the chart, looking at admission notes, medication records, vital signs. I get the order book off the cart by the elevator, just in case there was some mistake, and look to see whether it was me. It wasn't. The operation was done two days before I came on service. But all the way home, riding my bicycle on a path through eucalyptus trees, all I can think of is that tube wiggling free, and think, I did it, I did it, despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary.

5.

So the other day my father calls. Actually my mother calls and talks to me first and then yells for him to come down from the study and hands the phone to him because really he was the one who wanted to talk to me but she had to, I guess, warm me up. So we talk. What's going on here and what's going on there and about all the various brothers and sisters and what's going on with them, all the usual stuff, and what I'm doing next year and whether that leads anywhere and the inevitable question, am I doing any research? Yes, I say, and for the first time in my life it's true, I am doing research, despite vigorous, intense, at times frenzied efforts to avoid it, yes eventually everybody has to do research. And where will you live next year, he says. I tell him. We go through all the details. That's a lot of money, he says. This is New York, I say. It's a bargain. Here you could have a house and two acres and a swimming pool for that, he says. I'm sure you could, I say, but then you wouldn't be in New York, would you? And what are *your* plans? I say. Oh, he says, in a tone like that day when he called after his heart surgery, I really don't know. You don't, I say, what are the possibilities? And he talks about the possibilities and for a few moments it's as though I'm the father and he's the son and in some weird way he wants me to give him advice the same way he always wants me to want him to give me advice, which I always pretend to do but end up feeling angry afterward about because I don't feel listened to, but then I realize I'm not listening either, so I listen. When he's seventy he will have to give up his laboratory, he says. That will be hard, I say, I guess. Yes, he says. He could go to another hospital, he says, or he could go into practice for a lot of money or he could just go down to Florida and lie in the sun. That doesn't sound like you, I say. No it doesn't does it, he says, but I have to give up the laboratory, and for a moment it's like he's ten years old. And then my wife who has been watching TV gets up and says, hey we have to go swimming, the pool closes in forty-five minutes, so I say, hey Dad, I have to go in a . . . And he says I don't want to keep you, click.

And before I know it he's gone.

—David Hellerstein

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Last Words

From a notebook:

Sunday April 13

Early that morning, around 9 stayed til 2. She was sitting in her chair, *gorked out*, soft-boiled egg spilled on her gown.

She had been administered an overdose of a pain killer. She was sitting upright—or, rather, her body was slanted against the high-backed wheel chair, for "sitting" implies a certain activity of the will. In front of her was a tray with toast and soft-boiled egg. Her right hand hung to one side, clutching a fork; the egg yolk dribbled in a chain from her chin to the gown. She had stopped in mid-bite, as in a silly film time is frozen for some of the characters, and others walk about studying them. I thought she had died. But her chest was moving slightly.

I first saw a dead body in the dissection room at Johns Hopkins. My friend, Marc, a beginning medical student, learned anatomy there. My only visit—to meet Marc for lunch—left me with an unappetizing impression: corpse fat on corpse flesh, like chicken fat smeared on old meat.

The dissection room was full of comic relief. Various medical students were willing to swear that in the alley behind the lab lay wooden crates stamped PRODUCT OF INDIA. A sandwich would wind up inside a body cavity. One student rigged a string to his cadaver's penis and slung it over the light fixture. He greeted his partner with an erection. The occasion for every joke was "Joe" the stiff, the ultimate straight man.

Two years later, Marc was making his first hospital rounds. One day he walked into a room and greeted his patient, before seeing she was dead. He felt closed in. He forced open the window, stuck his head out and vomited down the air shaft.

Eventually, his stomach hardened. The joking from the cadaver room found its way to the hospital wards. In the young doctors' slang, a semi-comatose patient became a "gork." Is she alive or dead? *G*od *O*nly *R*eally *K*nows.

A gork might rest for weeks or months supported by an IV. The nursing staff would have to move her body to prevent bedsores, exercise her limbs, change her bedpans. The gorks could not talk, or would not. They just lay there. When a gork died, she "gave the Q-sign"—her tongue fell out of the corner of her mouth. But Q was also the abbreviation of a feeling.

The day I saw my mother "gorked out," I wished to record something particular in my notebook: "soft-boiled eggs spilled on her gown." It is a trick of realism to accumulate such details. They can come from anywhere. A good place is the dictionary.

There are strange writings, though, in which one detail looms larger than it should. No longer subordinated to the city planning of realism, such details break the pavement, trip up the narrative. Not symbols, but vain usurpers, they hypnotize the reader.

This is most striking in Poe's tale of hypnosis, "The Facts in the Case of Monsieur Valdemar." The narrator hypnotizes a man on his deathbed. But Valdemar does not die. Suspended in a trance-induced coma, he is literature's first gork. The gork personifies a horrible memory that will neither be forgotten, nor placed in a pattern. A memory that is disgusting, since it cannot be digested.

The conception of the tale is startling enough. But the detail that has haunted readers—apart from the gruesome ending—is Valdemar's voice. It "impressed me" says the narrator " . . . as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch."

The disgusting—or indigestible—voice of the gork is the undertone of an obsessed writing, a writing unable either to fully revive a cherished memory or to let it die. It is not just Monsieur Valdemar, but pained memory itself that cries out, "For God's sake!—quick!—quick—put me to sleep—or quick!—waken me!—quick!—*I say to you that I am dead.*"

Today the prolonged deathbed vigils Poe describes so hauntingly in "Valdemar" and "Ligeia" are commonplace. To our aid has come the death and dying movement. But Poe's tales imply that the notion of a "quality death" is a bit of a shuck. All the tearful family reconciliation scenes, the final expression of deep and hidden feelings, are sentimentalizations. Death cannot be improved. When Valdemar is released from his trance, his body immediately decays into a putrid liquid mass.

When I was a student a retired German professor hired me to help translate his poetry. He was a very sentimental poet, but that was God's fault. Fighting for the Kaiser in World War I, he had had a religious experience in the midst of the battle of Verdun. Terrified by the dying all around him, he sank to his knees and prayed to God, "Save me and I will dedicate my life to You."

Unfortunately, he was spared. And so he carried with him for the next fifty years a religious obsession, which gave him delusions of grandeur. He believed, for instance, that he had immense spiritual powers, could see into the future, and change people's lives. He was obsessed with health food and vitamins. He used to make awful herbal soups, bouillons with green and brown flecks floating on their greasy surface.

His diet did him some good. At seventy, he had great energy and vitality. He wore tight hiking shorts. His legs and arms were muscular, but the skin on his forehead was dry and shiny, pressed against his skull, giving him a cadaverous look. Death was on his mind constantly, death and Oral Roberts, whom he wrote, hoping to become a minister in his old age and testify about the effect of God on his life, the battlefield promise and revelation.

Whenever I entered his house, he would bring me into his kitchen, and make me drink his bouillon. Frequently he told me the story of his friend, an elderly woman who had died in her home and whose body had not been found for a week. Her dogs,

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desperately hungry, had eaten off her leg.

The old man's fear of death was hideous, enormous. It had dominated his whole life from the battlefield to the present. I could taste it in his bouillon, a deadly soup in which the details of his experience were broken down into protein and salt. He saw his body, abandoned, eaten away by death. He had hired me to find him when he died. He wanted me to help him, not just to translate his poetry, but to translate his death away from the unspeakable.

Instead, I found him disgusting.

"Disgust is the beginning of taste," wrote Baudelaire. Our sensibilities arise from what disgusts us. Perhaps we must make a project of finding out what disgusts us, as Poe proposed in his *Marginalia*.

> If any ambitious man have a fancy to revolutionize, at one effort, the universal world of human thought, human opinion, and human sentiment, the opportunity is his own—the road to immortal renown lies straight, open, and unencumbered before him. All that he has to do is to write and publish a very little book. Its title should be simple—a few plain words—"My Heart Laid Bare." But—this little book must be *true to its title.* (Poe, *Marginalia* # 10, January 1848.)

This was one of Poe's cleverest traps. No one has ever succeeded. It leads an ordinary man directly into sentimentality. Thousands of vanity press books could be titled *My Heart Laid Bare*. But that it should have been Baudelaire who took Poe up on it! Baudelaire was far too much the poet—and dandy—to lay bare his heart. The best he could do was his spleen. His abortive attempt included entries too perfectly horrible, as though even in self-revelation he required an artistic heightening of effect. He writes of "*immense* nausea of wall posters." He brags of a "beautiful conspiracy to organize the extermination of the Jewish Race."

The search for the significant detail is the point of intersection between symbolism and realism. Here is the crisis point, the decision point, in a writer's work, where his heart is truly laid bare. Will the detail be sentimental or sensational; that is, will the emotion associated with it be greater than is justified by its context?

The *excessive show* of feeling is what sentimentality and sensationalism have in common. That is why the strange tale of M. Valdemar was admired by such delicate sensibilities as Elizabeth Barrett, and found its way into every home in America.

Sensationalism is sentimentality, turned heart-side out. If sentimentality results from the too deep impression of a single feeling, sensationalism shows the embossed side. The croak of the raven; the voice of Monsieur Valdemar.

Not everyone agrees about what is sentimental. There is a point at which the sentimental shades over into genuine feeling, writing "from the heart," powerful testimony, revelation, etc. Sentimentality disrupts the hypnotic aspect of the text, the sense the reader has of being "lost in his reading." The reader, like the infant on the breast, wishes to be nourished by the continual flow of text.

There are, however, indigestible elements of my experience. I seem not to be able to leave them behind, yet I can do nothing with them. They spill out of me: egg yellow on a clean white gown.

There is a great mythology about "last words." Certainly death is a great framing device, but I am very suspicious, particularly of writers and their last words. They give their deaths a finished quality. Doesn't this presumption deprive ordinary people of the equality of death?

It is true that, in law, a deathbed confession is considered of higher value than any other. The dying man has nothing to lose. But doesn't that very fact contradict the value we place on "last words?" With nothing to lose, there is nothing to gain by setting a seal on life with last words.

There are two versions of Poe's last words, one sentimental, one sensational. In the sentimental version, Poe is said to have gently moved his head and murmured, "Lord help my poor soul!" That ending belongs to the realm of Poe's poetry. But in the sensational—or prose version, Poe's physician asked him if he had any friends he would like to see before he died.

> "Friends!" exclaimed the dying son of genius—"friends!" repeating the word for a moment as if it had no longer a definite meaning; "my best friend would be he who would take a pistol and blow out these damned wretched brains!"

Which Poe presided over my mother's last moments, the sentimental or the sensational? The poet or the prose writer? He was surely there, since my mother and he died at the same Church Home hospital. Was he disguised as an orderly, in the hallway, or was he hidden among the stately white tulips in the hospice garden, among those last afternoons?

No. Characteristically, he was there as a mechanical device. There was an awful pump in the room, a contraption that smelled of the nineteenth century, a vacuum jar with rubber tubes, a piston that moved lugubriously up and down inside the vacuum with an expiring sound. There was Poe—in that jar. I will never forget its sad gelatinous quivering. My mother's throat was full of phlegm, and there was white mold growing on her tongue and gums, from lack of eating. The nurse would stick the tube down her throat to try to draw up the phlegm. I made her stop. The sound of the pump was too much to bear. It disturbed my mother in her sleep. So Poe was removed from the room, and ordinary prose took over.

She died to easy listening. Because life is often perfectly ironic, the call letters of the station were WLIF, "the music of your life." I was even annoyed with her for it, and thought of changing the station.

The other sound in the room was a death rattle. Harsh, rasping. It had an odor of salt about it, if a sound can have an odor. Her voice was becoming elemental, and mucose as the sea.

Then her eyelids fluttered and she lifted her head from the pillow. Her breath quieted. My father leaned forward and said her name with great happiness. I think he believed she was coming out of the coma. Indeed, her eyes opened, she looked directly into his with full consciousness. She spoke her last words very distinctly, in tones that seemed humanly distant from the grotesque death rattle. And then she was gone.

It was as though a dying animal had suddenly risen many steps up the evolutionary scale, and pronounced the first human words. And the effort of will, to say those last words, exhausted her. One had the sensation of the spirit leaving her body with the voice, and the body cast off like so many used clothes.

The words she spoke, so familiar, were utterly appropriate to the ges-

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ture. There is a point at which sentimental words cannot be sentimental because they are the *only* words.

I've often wondered, since, how much she was aware, even in coma. A few minutes before she died, I had persuaded my father to break off our vigil and go downstairs for a Coke. It seemed useless to sit, since the nurse had told us she might remain in coma for days. My father wanted to wait, though, until exactly five o'clock, when the shift changed. Then the phone rang, my sister calling. At the bell, my mother stirred.

There we were: my father, my sister, and I, together at the same moment. As though my mother had pulled the threads that connected her to the world in one knot. She moved, my sister spoke, my father leaned forward, and all of us were united in one gesture, her last.

A few months after she died, I had a dream in which my mother and I took a walk in a French garden. In the dream, she taught me that disparate events had an underlying unity, or as she put it: "All things pass through spirit like a single wave through water."

The setting of the dream was a last walk we took in the hospice garden. But its origin was her death. She pulled everything together then.

But where is the spirit she spoke of? I say I have felt it, have felt her presence after her death, but that sounds sentimental. In the Hebrew liturgy, "The dead live on in the thoughts of those that cherish them." Perhaps that is more exact. But is it enough to say, knowing how treacherous memory is, how easily we are distracted by the wrong details?

Often I am left with my own Q-sign. It is an abbreviation for a feeling, like a card stamped, "my mother is dead." After a time the card is dirty with thumbprints, worn at the edges, the card is just a card with words printed on it, a card printed a thousand times for a thousand others. A cliché, a cheap reproduction.

At such times, pulling out that old card, I admit with a sigh, "My mother is dead. So what? My mother is dead, your mother will be dead, all mothers have died and will die." I cannot privilege my mother or make her portrait, ultimately, more distinct than another's. If I can, it is just a detail read by a stranger. He may find the words perfectly sentimental.

—Rodger Kamenetz

Playing the Literary Game

Suspicious Origins, by Perry Glasser. New Rivers. $6.00 (paper).

Close-Ups, by Sandra Thompson. University of Georgia. $12.95.

On My Being Dead and Other Stories, by L.W. Michaelson. Galileo Press. $3.49 (paper).

The Slugger Heart and Other Stories, by Joseph Campos-De Metro. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $12.95.

The Intelligent Traveler's Guide to Chiribosco, by Jonathan Penner. Galileo Press. $3.49 (paper).

In his essay "Myth in the Narrative," Italian fiction writer Italo Calvino offers a shocking and yet surprisingly simple definition of the literary effort. "Literature," he writes, "is a combinatorial game which plays on the possibilities intrinsic to its own material . . ." By this definition, fiction is not about the writer, the reader, or the world beyond language; it is, quite simply, about itself, "the permutations of a finite set of elements and functions." Literature is not so much creative as re-creative. In Calvino's sense, literary discourse always already exists; it is the writer's job not to invent but to accept this discourse, to act within the traditional literary arena, to work with the elements that literary history has given him.

Such acceptance of tradition seems strange, coming from one of Europe's leading avant-gardists. But Calvino also adds that the writer must both accept the given forms of literature and transform them at the same time, that he must work within the tradition of literary meaning in hopes of realizing "an unexpected sense . . . an unforeseen effect . . . or at least the premonition of one."

In our postmodern age when literature has become open to serious questioning, the literary work often questions itself and its own form by following Calvino's example—by taking its place within the existing literary discourse and playing with the elements found there. The literary work, then, is a game played according to definite rules. It is not work at all but play—not creation but recreation.

Much recent American fiction accepts and plays with given forms, drawing on both traditional literature and popular culture, often exploring the points at which lit and pop meet. The love story is a good example of an ancient source that has provided some of the best and the worst literature ever written. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Madame Bovary*, and TV soap operas like *Days of Our Lives* and *One Life to Live* are combinations and re-combinations of the same traditional elements that can be juggled again and again and will be, probably forever.

Perry Glasser's collection of stories, *Suspicious Origins*, is sometimes uneven, but Glasser is at his best when he plays with the elements of the love tale. The title story follows the rules of the traditional love story point for point, but here the lovers are a 34-year-old psychotic and a teenage runaway brought together for a higher purpose—to level the Bronx and turn it into a wildlife preserve. The lovers and their story are hilariously mad, thanks to Glasser's playful skills which draw much from the popular culture that has taught us how to read love stories and has taught his characters how to behave. As Elise explains her philosophy of life to madman Daryl:

> "I'd never been a whore. When I was a kid, in the eighth grade, I read all those books by Xaviera Hollander and all I wanted to do was be a whore but last year I saw this *true* show on TV."

"Saving Q-Tips" also demands that we come to Glasser's story already knowing the basic elements and variations of the love tale—in this case, the middle-aged man and the younger woman—so we can see how the author has played his own game within that literary form. Glasser's narrator knows that we already know his story ("Susan is a law student. I am an attorney. You see how we met."), but he tells his tale in any

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case, and in so doing, he lays bare the form of the love story while at the same time transforming it and making it new.

Sandra Thompson, whose collection *Close-Ups* is clearly the best considered here, also plays with the form of the love story—in this case, the love story of "true confession" magazines, with ex-husbands, new husbands, lovers (ex- and new), divorces, infidelities. Thompson takes enormous risks. Given her subject matter, the stories could easily turn into soap opera. But in each case the author skillfully presents a story that is made from the stuff of soap opera and yet becomes something else.

Thompson has a sure sense of understatement and incident. Most of the pieces here are constructed of separate events, isolated on the page, which somehow add up to make a story. But the action and the connections take place in the white spaces between these events, thus putting the reader to work in the telling of the tale. Like Glasser, Thompson knows that we understand the elements of her chosen form even before we come to her work, and she uses our knowledge to make us willing participants in her literary efforts.

The title story is a romance about a female student in love with her professor—a story we know well. But, as in all Thompson's work, it is not the *what* of the story but the *how* that counts. Like Glasser's characters, Thompson's student relies on pop culture to define and explain her life—the same pop culture that gives her own story its form.

> I run my hand down the jagged scar on his thigh. Bayonet, Italy, World War II. What is a bayonet? I try to remember from the late shows. He rolls down the shot-up Italian hill and is nursed by Italian whores. Anna Magnani.

"Mother's Day" is a fine example of how Thompson plays within a given form. Here, the narrator is obsessed with the lurid details of life according to the scandal sheets.

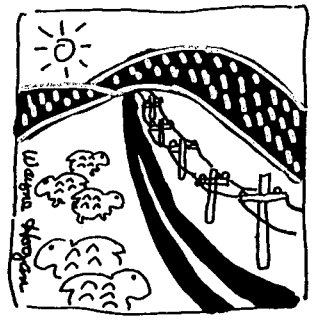
> In the Village, on the same street where I lived, a girl was murdered. The stabs took less than ten seconds. From the description in the paper, the girl looked just like me.

The details are terrifying, shocking, commonplace. And yet, in the next sentence, Thompson transforms them completely. "I wish there had been a picture so I could be certain it was not me."

The key to Thompson's transformations of the given is her unique ability to move from event to imagination—to equate the two and disrupt the traditional flow of the love story. In doing so, as in "Notes," she pushes the love story farther than it will go by casting the given aspects of the form in the light of fantasy—but a fantasy born of the popular arts.

> She is aware of herself and Barry as if they were in a movie: she and Barry in his Volkswagen on the slick highway in the rain in the dark. Cut to flashback: she and Barry in his Chevy Supersport, empty highway, gray morning. They are driving away from the motel eight years ago. Barry says, mock-serious, "This is a portentous day." Pan to gray empty sky.

L.W. Michaelson's fiction also collapses event and imagination, the credible and the incredible. There are love stories in *On My Being Dead,* including "The Ferrari." Here the narrator pieces together stories told by his auto mechanic about an expensive sports car to create his own imaginary tale of star-crossed lovers, "The $18,000 Romance." The story-within-the-story is firmly within the genre of the love tale; it is Michaelson's brilliant setting for this tale that re-creates the form, that exposes the fantasy of the given, the imaginative qualities underlying literary forms that seem natural, even banal, until writers like Michaelson force us to reconsider them.



Michaelson owes much to the fantasy tale, the ghost story, and many of his works play within that genre. Again, the emphasis is on the transformation of the tradition. "An Early Frost" is the ghost story become mundane, everyday. The narrator hires a horticulturist, Earl King, to help save the trees on his property. Earl King turns out to be the Erl König of German legend, and the meeting with this fantastic character sends the narrator on a hilarious search, first for the mythical imp himself, then for a way to escape him.

Michaelson transforms the fantasy tale by presenting the fantastic in a matter-of-fact style, as if he were simply reporting events. For instance, in "Phocian:"

> Phocian hadn't been a cow for very damn long when one of those spooky, long-tailed magpies came swooping down into the clover field and started pecking at something in the grass not two feet away.

"The Flying Dutchman" is a variation of another legend, though in this case the "death ship" is an ancient car that travels the highways of the Southwest eternally. The truck driver/narrator and his partner first hear the story from a truck stop waitress named Dixie. Later, the death car is supposedly the cause of a wreck that kills another trucker. The narrator's partner finds proof that the accident was really murder, but the narrator does not like the facts of the case. "I like Dixie's story a bit better," he says. "There's an old coin and a lantern in that one." In other words, Dixie's story of the "death car" has all the elements of fiction. And like those of us who read fiction, Michaelson's narrator prefers stories to reality, though he understands that the real—in this case, his friend's detective work that solves the mystery—is also only another kind of story.

If Michaelson has chosen to work (and play) in the arena of fantasy fiction, Joseph Campos-De Metro's stories move in the opposite direction. He draws on the tradition of working class realism, on the works of Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, James T. Farrell, and others. It is important to remember here that, despite the label, "realism" is no more realistic than fantasy or romance. It is simply another literary form, with its own distinctive techniques, elements, and procedures that Campos-De Metro has adopted as his own. His characters are the unemployed, the minimum wage earners, and the neighborhood people of Newark, New Jersey. The events are those of working class life, told in a strong Jersey dialect that is the finest element of Campos-De Metro's work.

But *The Slugger Heart and Other Stories* shows the risks a writer runs

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when he chooses to work within an accepted form. Though Campos-De Metro hopes to extend and update an established tradition, though he hopes to transform a genre of the past and make it speak again in the present, he only repeats the traditional elements of the form—and he does it badly.

At their best, the stories here are clichés and the repetition of clichés. The title story tells of a working class family facing the tragic death of a child, but Campos-De Metro offers no new perspective on this situation, and his writing is so obtrusive that it denies the reader even a stock response.

> It was like this for Mary: although her heart would skip every fourth beat for Peter, it would go on beating.
>
> So she rolled up the sleeves of that heart and it came out slugging.

Pushed a bit farther, prose like this could become broad parody, though the plot of "The Slugger Heart" would make for a very black kind of humor. But Campos-De Metro is not trying to be funny.

In fact, at his worst, he is openly mean-spirited and unsympathetic. In the overly-long story, "The Grape's Vine, the Horse's Mouth," an elderly grandmother dies horribly and, according to Campos-De Metro, seems to deserve what she gets for trying to be so independent. Whether this is the author's intention or not, he often seems to use the elements of working-class fiction to set a stage on which his characters become victims, not because they are poor, underprivileged, or ignorant, but simply because they have it coming. Compared to Italo Calvino's neorealist parodies in *Marcovaldo: Seasons in the City* or Gilbert Sorrentino's innovative working-class fiction in *Steelwork*, Campos-De Metro's stories are not transformations but cruel perversions of his chosen genre.

Jonathan Penner's short book is a wild experiment that runs an incredible risk, for the writing here is intentionally bad. As such, Penner walks the narrow boundary between funny prose and prose that is actually bad. But this writer's sense of balance is invariably perfect, and *The Intelligent Traveler's Guide to Chiribosco* is a brilliantly funny success.

The other writers we've considered here have chosen to work and play in a variety of given literary forms, but Penner has gone beyond the literary by adopting the form of the popular traveler's guidebook and using it for his own purposes. In *Chiribosco*, Penner plays the role of an editor who presents a work by Alan Archer—would-be author and adventurer and hardcore foot fetishist. Archer's obsession is his life, and he is distracted from his mundane career—crawling under tables and secretly painting the toenails of coeds in the Columbia University library—by the discovery of the ancient stone goddess Mbaguli of Chiribosco in a nearby museum. The size and shape of the idol's toes convince him that her primitive worshippers are a culture of foot fetishists, and he goes to Chiribosco in search of them and his personal dream of paradise.

Penner ingeniously fits Archer's ludicrous adventures into the stock format of the traveler's guide which, at first glance, is precisely what this volume seems to be. All the categories are here—"Language," "Flora and Fauna," "History," "Chiribosco on a Budget"—and yet the stories beneath these headings are not what one would expect. The section on "Topography" is in fact a topographical analysis of the idol Mbaguli's feet ("About each toe I could write a book") and "Health Precautions" is a letter from an editor who rejects Archer's book for publication and suggests that he seek psychiatric help.

Archer is convinced that his obsession is totally reasonable, even morally superior—"I felt for the first time that my life had a real purpose," he tells his readers, "and I only wish you could feel the same about yours." But, of course, for all his pretentions, Archer is raving mad and certainly one of the worst writers who ever lived:

> Awaiting me was danger incalculably great—from these would-be kidnappers of my goddess, from the fanatical Pindas, from the police, from rockslide and quicksand, from heat and exposure, from starvation and disease, from madness. I therefore wish, at the risk of dissipating the tension of my narrative, to assure the reader that I did in fact survive the events that I am about to narrate.

Penner is openly and hilariously playful within his chosen form, but Thompson, Glasser, and Michaelson are also involved in complex literary play. The possibilities, permutations, and combinations of any literary form are almost infinite, but these authors do not write love stories or fantasies simply by following the established rules of these genres, by filling in the blanks of a pre-established form. Instead, by playing with and within these forms, the authors create works that are examples of the genres and that question the genres at the same time. Such stories become their own critiques and make us aware of the arbitrariness of the forms we have learned to accept as somehow natural to literature. Penner, Thompson, Glasser, and Michaelson work and play at the limits of these accepted forms to show us the possibilities beyond the familiar horizons of genres that have always been with us and that still are not exhausted. —*Welch D. Everman*

SF: Failures of Focus

Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy, ed. George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin, and Robert Scholes.

The End of the World, ed. Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander,

No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction, ed. Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander.

The Science Fiction of Kris Neville, ed. Barry Malzberg and Martin H. Greenberg,

Illinois University Press "Alternatives" series, each $19.95.

The "Alternatives" series from Southern Illinois continues to produce the most respectable of the academic titles currently flooding the science fiction field.

A few years back, such a salute would have had little meaning, but with the recent surge of studies in "popular culture" generally, and SF in particular, the comment takes on some significance. Yet for all its prestige, the "Alternatives" series seems peculiarly unfocused; it has included reprints of old SF magazines, collections of SF stories by Arthur Conan Doyle and Cornell Woolrich (both

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better known for mysteries than for SF), a collection of autobiographical comments by modern SF authors, and an anthology of stories by Mark Clifton, a respected but somewhat obscure SF author of the fifties.* "Unfocused" may seem little more than a reviewer's complaint that it's difficult to find a convenient pigeonhole for the series' individual titles, but I mean it to go a bit further. Whatever the general value of the series may be, I don't think it likely that any *individual* reader will find the entire group congenial, and the four titles here exemplify my point.

The Science Fiction of Kris Neville is the easiest of the four to treat individually, since it is the only one which includes SF, as opposed to *comments* on SF. I must own, though, to finding the book almost embarrassing to discuss.

Neville died recently, so recently that the book's Library of Congress cataloging information lists him as "Neville, Kris, 1925- ." We learn of his death in Barry Malzberg's appreciative foreword to the anthology:

> I've had a terrible dream for five days now since I heard; I dreamt that Kris Neville was dead. I've dreamed that he died suddenly from a heart attack two days before Christmas while his life and the field he loved were opening up for him and I cannot bear this dream, I'm trying to break out of it but I don't think that I'm going to make it this time; like mortality itself it seems hung on me. Cut it out, Kris, it isn't funny any more, you've proven your point and now it's time to get back to work. . . .
>
> You could have been the best of us and instead you got torn up by this field, you had to walk away from it a long time ago because you couldn't do with it what you wanted and when you came back for another try they weren't having any of it again. . . .
>
> It is very hard to find a voice for this appreciation and obituary. . . . I hope that I never have to write an essay like this again and if I were given an opportunity to pass this one I would. Unfortunately I am not granted that opportunity.

It's painful to affirm that Malzberg is right in his self-evaluation; why he *had* no "opportunity to pass" on writing this introduction is unclear, but he shouldn't have written it. He identifies too closely with Neville for several reasons, not the least of which is that Neville felt burned-out by the SF field's hungry demands and ungenerous rewards—just as Malzberg has felt himself to have been consumed.

For all his castigation of SF, Malzberg is one of the field's important and influential writers. It's touching, then, to hear him say of Neville, "He had given me the truth: if I had any position in science fiction as writer, historian, scholar, or *mensch* I owed it all to him. 'Kris thought you were wonderful,' his widow said to me in our brief, shocked conversation Christmas night. 'I'm not wonderful,' I said, 'not nearly, not at all, but if I'm anything it's because he made me that way.' "

And yet, Malzberg's encomiums make one mistrust his judgment of Neville's work, especially when much of Malzberg's fondness for Neville seems based on shared attitudes toward SF, toward Richard Nixon, and toward certain editors. The failing in Neville's work is that it simply does not live up to the billing given it by Malzberg, who cites six of the stories included here as "masterpieces": "They center this field. Given half a chance Neville would have made everyone know what a few of us already know: he was the best of us."

One of the stories Malzberg cites as "centering the field" is "Cold War," the plot of which focuses on the psychological problem of personnel responsible for nuclear weapons orbiting in space who begin to show signs of homicidal madness, a madness which promises to lead to their dispatching missiles to earth. This 1949 story is no disaster, but it occasionally lapses into the awkward techniques which mar much of the SF of its time. A Senator visits the President for a briefing, and is told "I am going to cover material with which you are completely familiar. You will forgive me, but it is necessary to stress a few points." If such contrivances "center the field," they do it in no admirable fashion. The story's early date might make us forgive its occasional clumsiness and persuade us to concentrate instead on the thematic significance of the plot. But then we would have to forget that Robert Heinlein developed essentially the same plot in "Blowups Happen," which was written in 1939.

The two best-known of Neville's stories in the collection, "Bettyann" (1951) and "Overture" (1954), were frequently anthologized and then reworked by Neville to form a novel, *Bettyann* (1971). Sentimentally, they tell the story of a star-child orphan, marooned on earth in the female body of a human infant. Thematically, again, the story covers ground familiar to SF readers of Zenna Henderson's series of "The People." Those who seek a feminist slant to the work should be forewarned that its heroine, after going native, falls in love with a nice doctor. (A third story in the group, "Bettyann's Children" [1973] is not included in this collection.)

Stories in the anthology which Malzberg does *not* include in his "group of six" seem even more contrived. In "Hunt the Hunter" (1951), a callous group of earthlings hunt carnivorous beasts on an alien planet. They use the technique of staking out a bait to attract their prey, and then close in on it, only to receive a big surprise in the story's last line. Unfortunately, the surprise ending is so clearly telegraphed by the title that there seems no point in spelling it out. Ultimately, one concedes that Neville is a competent writer, and that his stories typify a kind of SF developing during the fifties. Stories he published in the sixties—also represented here—are somewhat more trendy, dealing with the insanity by which individuals ("Ballenger's People") and societies ("The Price of Simeryl") justify their immoral drives, the almost willful decadence of modern western society ("New Apples in the Garden"), and the destruction to the individual in social "channeling." But to be trendy is to follow examples, not to create them, and the trends Neville exemplifies in these stories can be found in *Brave New World, 1984, Mother Night, Being There* and innumerable other works.

The *Science Fiction of Kris Neville* is not a bad collection, and those interested in SF of the fifties and sixties will probably find it of interest. But the books in the "Alternatives" series are not cheap. Those who wish to read "typical" works of the period have cheaper options, and these stories do not live up to the sales pitch Malzberg gives them. In fact, the book's greatest significance is probably in what its foreword tells us about

*The eight previous books in the "Alternatives" series have been reviewed in these pages earlier; see "SF: Mapping the Territory" (June 1981) and "SF: Fact and Facsimile" (December 1982).

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Malzberg (whose work *is* of terrific impact in SF and whose views on the field are of considerable interest) than in the stories it includes.

The other three new books from the "Alternatives" series are anthologies of SF criticism. Some collections of this sort focus on individual authors. Olander and Greenberg have edited several such volumes in their "Writers of the 21st Century" series for Taplinger, a series which includes volumes of essays by different hands on such writers as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, and Ursula K. Le Guin. Other collections, like Irving Howe's *"1984" Revisited: Totalitarianism in Our Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), concern a single work. One thing to be said for such anthologies is that they do have a focus. If one is interested in *1984*, or Heinlein, or whatever the collection's topic is, then one can be reasonably confident that, quality aside, there is a subject in the book which merits attention.

These collections lack such a focus.

The most important of the group is *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, a collection of essays produced for the third Eaton Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy (essays from the two preceding conferences have already appeared in the series). I deem *Coordinates* the most important of these anthologies partly because it contains essays by several of the most important scholarly commentators on SF today, including Rabkin and Slusser themselves, Mark Rose (whose *Alien Encounters* is a landmark work), Bruce Franklin (winner of the 1983 Pilgrim Award for scholarship from the Science Fiction Research Association), Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert (co-authors of *Madwoman in the Attic*, a major contribution to feminist criticism of the gothic and surreal), and Leslie Fiedler (who literally needs no introduction).

Fiedler, in "The Criticism of Science Fiction," does much to illuminate a central question of SF scholarship: whether the methodologies of traditional criticism are appropriate to the field. SF fans, most of whom read science fiction for qualities that have little to do with literary criticism, have long been put off by what they feel are the cumbersome scholarly efforts to analyze SF with traditional critical methods. Conversely, scholars in the area have tended to view it as an unmined mother lode of valuable ore for established methods of critical assay.

In this regard, Fiedler comes down heavily on the side of the fans. Beginning with a consideration of "the growing alienation of serious criticism of science fiction from the genre it purports to examine and illuminate," he suggests that "a study of how what began as an activity congruous with its subject has become academicized and estranged would cast light on the general dilemma of criticism at the moment, ever more remote from the texts with which it deals and ever less available to the common reader." He rejects as counterproductive the attempts of academics to apply to SF the "standards of elite criticism" to establish "a canon of ok literature within the genre, cleaning house, as it were."

In developing these ideas, Fiedler offers thoughts on how popular SF differs from works of experimentalist fiction with which it may share some techniques, how SF differs from other popular literary genres ("no other pop genre has been so self-aware"), and how he is "diseased" with the work of "structuralists and poststructuralists like Eric S. Rabkin and Robert Scholes." In brief, from Fiedler's position the traditional methods of literary criticism are inadequate to deal with science fiction, a form of literature whose value rests in its mythopoeic power rather than in "[its] ethical import and metaphysical insight, [its] architectonic skill or linguistic subtlety." In developing alternate methods which can deal with SF, critics will succeed in illuminating the entire field of esthetics—at least as that field applies to popular literature.

Many of the remaining essays are ripostes, in one fashion or another, to Fiedler's arguments. Rabkin, for instance, in "The Descent of Fantasy," asserts that "part of the true use of a story is its aesthetic value," its being "well-made and rhetorically interesting." Since "narratives that are the least susceptible to physical test must be judged most by their well-madeness," it follows that "fantasies [and, presumably, in a somewhat different way, science fiction] are special narratives made of unfalsifiable events," which must therefore be evaluated more by the aesthetic values of being well-made and rhetorically interesting than would other forms of narrative.

What is attractive about most of these essays is that they do relate, in one way or another, to the question of what is legitimate criticism of science fiction, and how such criticism applies to specific texts. Bruce Franklin and Gary K. Wolfe analyze popular attitudes toward, respectively, the 1939 volume of *Astounding*, the key SF "pulp" magazine of its day, and two well-known short stories (Heinlein's "Waldo" and Clifford Simak's "Desertion"). Other essays in the collection offer close, and more traditionally academic, readings of individual longer texts, running from Jules Verne's *A*

LETTERS

To the Editor:

As a gay male I was happy to see Mr. Daniel Curzon's "Why We Came to Sodom" in the Dec. '83 *North American Review*. I wish, though, to take exception to his apparent view that the right to a promiscuous sex life is a hallmark of gay liberation. I fear that the Gay Rights movement is doomed by too many genitalia-centered analyses such as Mr. Curzon's. The hope of a cure for AIDS is neither a reason to shrug off the dangers that accompany promiscuity, nor an excuse for gays not to examine the roots of their supposed collective desire for frequent, anonymous sex. It is very easy to continue having sex in back rooms, baths, and bushes and not shoulder the responsibility of a long-term, monogamous relationship; but if, as Mr. Curzon states, he would like to see gay couples raising intelligent, inquiring children, then it seems to me that the most radical thing we can do is to march forward into a heterosexually-defined society and show that, in light of the deterioration of the traditional nuclear family, gay couples can provide the love and stability necessary to raise those wonderful children Mr. Curzon dreams of.

Mr. Curzon's simplistic analysis does nothing but defend the status quo. I think that, as Allen Ginsberg states in his poem "America," it is time "to put [our] queer shoulders to the grindstone."

Bill Landis
Rochester, NY

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Journey to the Center of the Earth and H. Rider Haggard's *She* to Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and Samuel R. Delaney's *Triton*.

The variety of content gives some idea of the breadth represented in the volume; underlying that variety is a uniform quality that is high indeed, and *Coordinates* serves as a solid compendium of the critical methods and issues that pervade modern SF scholarship.

The other two volumes are more difficult to summarize. *The End of the World* is a collection of six essays (two by the same person) on the theme of Armageddon as it is found in various texts. Such a focus has a long tradition in the marketing of primary works of science fiction; in the heyday of the SF anthology, collections of short stories by various authors on such recurring topics as robots, Armageddon, first meetings with aliens, lunar landings, and so on were a stock in trade—and to some extent continue to be such.

One wonders if an interest in creative variations on such themes legitimately expands to include collections of critical analyses of the variations. However, the big term in SF criticism these days is "mythopoeia." In an essay included in *The End of the World,* Robert Galbreath argues that science fiction "is essentially characterized by a signficant concern with presenting as objectively real various 'radical discontinuities' "; it serves our disbelieving times (which still "need . . . the transcendental") through the "creation of a credible natural supernaturalism." Galbreath's view recalls that of Brian Aldiss in *The Billion Year Spree,* that *Frankenstein* (which Aldiss sees as the seminal work of SF) is "more than a new story, a new myth."

The "newness" of such myth is arguable. Stories of the end of the world are so ingrained in our culture that it is difficult to find synonyms for such an end which lack the religious connotations of "apocalypse," "Armageddon," "doomsday," and "holocaust." (Mary Shelley subtitled her novel "The New Prometheus.") But Galbreath's contention (and I would presume the implicit foundation of most of the essays in *The End of the World*) is that the recasting of such myths into a form that, at least to some extent, is "credible" to our age gives science fiction a degree of relevance to modern culture exceeding that of other popular, or even literary, genres.

By such a light, a work like *The End of the World* is more than a mere anthology of criticism of a sub-genre (Armageddon) of a sub-genre (science fiction) of popular fiction; it is, in fact, a collective effort toward something like a *Golden Bough* for our times. The position borders on fatuous self-importance, but it is repeatedly enunciated by an impressive number of critics, several of whom are represented here.

The last book of this group, *No Place Else,* is by far the most difficult for me to comment upon—and not merely because it is one to which I have contributed an essay. *The End of the World* is a collection of essays on the theme of the end of the world. *No Place Else* is a collection of individual essays on specific works, united only by the fact that each of the considered specific works is utopian or dystopian. Practically, then, *No Place Else* is a group of thirteen essays on works running from Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon,* through Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984,* to Silverberg's *The World Inside* and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed.*

Obvious questions of selection arise in the case. Why Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* and not Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward?* Why Butler's *Erewhon* and not William Morris's *News from Nowhere?* Why Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* but not Samuel Delaney's *Triton?* Why William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* but not Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* or *The Wanting Seed?* Such questions, I suppose, have to be answered with the point that one can't include everything in a book of this sort, and editorial taste affected the final result. That answer's insufficiency reveals not so much the problem with the anthology as with its concept. The texts covered here are by no means a "canon" of utopian/dystopian literature, nor are they considered in relation to one another; though most of the essays stop at some point to rattle off the names of several related texts, the related texts remain untreated. Each essay stands as a discrete contribution to a volume unified only by its arrangement of the discussed utopian/dystopian works into chronological order.

This is not to say that the collection has no value, but merely that it lacks synergistic value. Each essay stands or falls on its own merit, contributing little or nothing to the strengths of its fellows. As a contributor, I find this fact disheartening, since some of the essays are strong indeed.

For example, James W. Bittner has enough insightful and helpful points in his "Chronosophy, Aesthetics, and Ethics in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*" to justify purchasing the book—provided one is interested in what is probably the best essay that has been done on Le Guin's masterpiece. But Bittner's essay, the last in the collection by the book's chronological ordering, does little or nothing to clarify the relationship of *The Dispossessed* to the texts discussed in the preceding twelve essays, other than to note the "anachronism" of Le Guin's writing a utopia when the prevailing trend was for dystopias. His essay brilliantly elucidates the structural nature of *The Dispossessed,* in part by considering the parallels between its narrative structure and certain musical forms.

The reader uninterested in Bittner's insights into *The Dispossessed* may enjoy B.G. Knepper's cheery exhumation of *The Coming Race* in which we find that Bulwer-Lytton (original author of "It was a dark and stormy night . . .") produced a work that not only has literary value and "is fun," but is also "an important item in the humanist arsenal against despair." Knepper's ethical-historical approach shares little with Bittner's, and few readers who admire the Le Guin text are likely to care much about that of Bulwer-Lytton (or, perhaps, vice-versa).

Finally, it's difficult to recommend for or against the collection as a whole. Even if one begins with a desire to read criticism on utopian/dystopian literature, one may not find what one is looking for here, since there is little general discussion of the form. (A short initial comment by Rabkin does offer a few thoughts, but doesn't begin to pull the remaining thirteen essays together.) Specific works that might be critical to a given reader's interest may be ignored or barely mentioned. An essay on a particular text of interest may be one of the book's weaker ones. But, conversely, the book shouldn't be ignored. It contains gems, and a single essay like Bittner's, for many readers, will justify the entire collection. —*Thomas J. Remington*

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Iowa School of Letters Award for Short Fiction
Department of English
English-Philosophy Building
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242

No application forms are necessary. Entries for the 1985 competition should be submitted between August 1, 1984, and September 30, 1984. Announcement of the winner will be made early in 1985.

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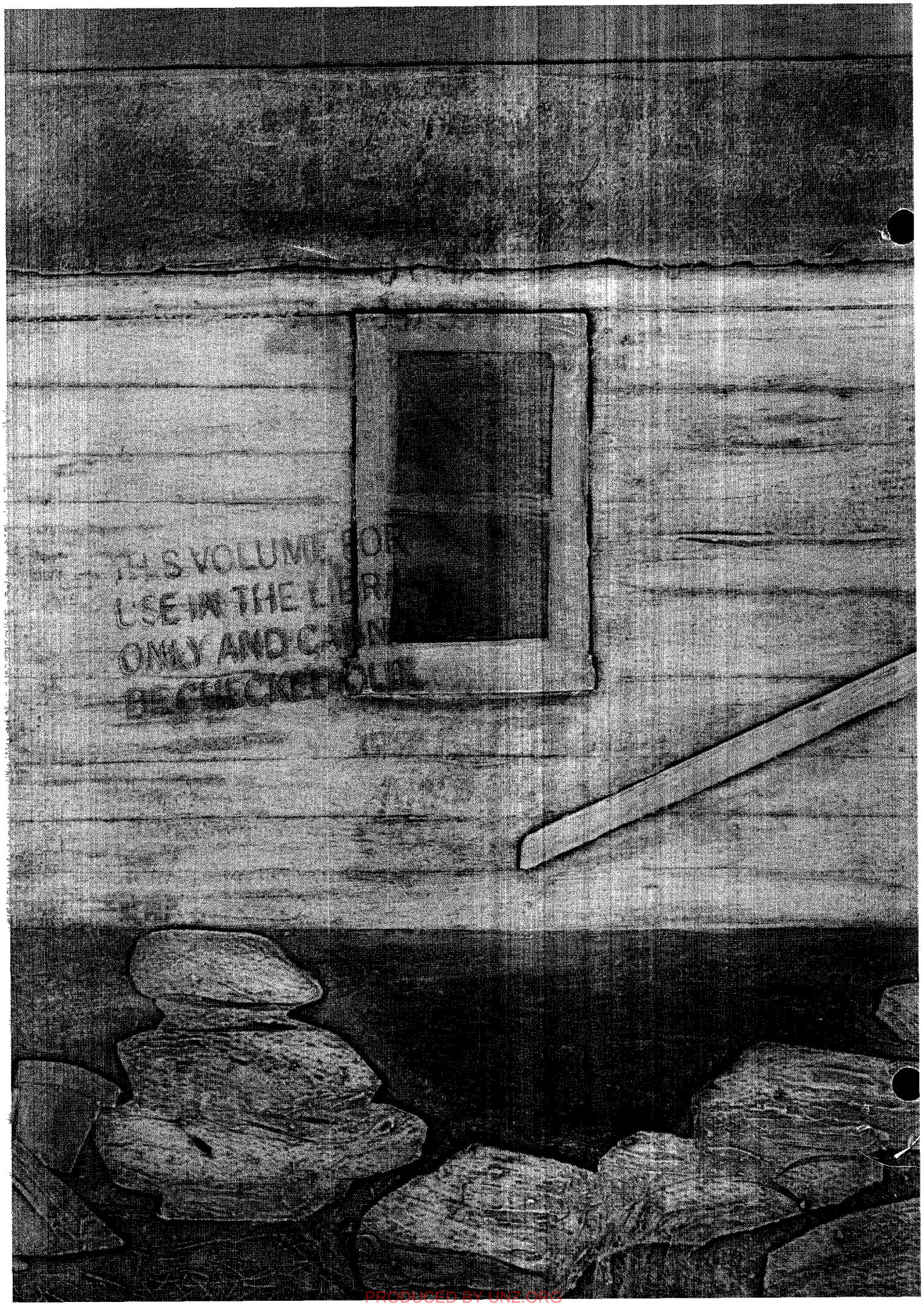

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